Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Alexander Khalili & Amina Inloes

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

Like most Meccan chapters, Sūrah Luqmān (31), Sūrah al-Sajdah (32), and Sūrah Sabaʾ (34) revolve around the central concepts of Islamic doctrine – monotheism, the afterlife, and prophethood – as well as ethical and moral exhortations. Sūrah Luqmān, however, is unique, in that it details the teachings of the sage Luqmān, thought to have lived in Ethiopia around 1100 BC. While accounts of Luqmān circulated in the Arabian Peninsula prior to Islam, he is one of the few Qur'anic sacred figures to lack a direct parallel in the Bible. Therefore, ʿAllāmah includes a special discussion on who he was, what narrations say about him, and whether he was a prophet.

Primarily, Sūrah Luqmān follows the frame story of Luqmān advising his son; for instance, exhorting him to lower his voice, since it is the donkey that brays the loudest, and to abstain from swaggering. Despite the 2000+ year gap between Luqmān and today, this advice is particularly suited to today's political discourse and social media. The chapter concludes with thought-provoking verses such as:

> *If the trees of the earth were pens, and the sea replenished with seven more seas, the words of God would not be spent* (31:27).
>
> *Your creation and your resurrection are not but as of a single soul* (31:28).

Unlike Sūrah Luqmān, Sūrah al-Sajdah emphasizes the origin and fate of the human being. Born from base origins, the human being is enlivened by the divine breath, lives for a time, and then returns to God and finds a fate in the hereafter concordant with his or her deeds.

Sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33) differs from the other chapters analyzed in this volume, in that it discusses real-time concerns troubling the nascent Muslim polity in Medina, and the urgent need to set laws, establish social standards, and arrange for defence. Although an important event discussed in this chapter is the Battle of Khandaq (627 CE), which the exegesis includes lengthy historical narrations on, this chapter also shows that many challenges were internal. For instance, it condemns gossiping, hypocrisy, and sedition. It aims to correct harmful behavior and poor manners, such as eyeing the Prophet's wives. It urges the believing women to don outer

garments discourage catcalling or abuse. From this chapter, one gets a sense of the uphill battle the Prophet sometimes faced in building his community, and his patience.

This chapter is also unique in its focus on the private life of the Prophet. Special rules and expectations are outlined for his wives, who are given the option to leave him in pursuit of material wealth. It speaks of the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab, the former wife of his adopted son Zayd, and chides the Muslims for loitering at the Prophet's house: while the Prophet is too polite to say anything about it, God is not. This chapter is known for the verses declaring the purification of and blessings upon the Household of the Prophet (33:33, 33:56), which are a special focus of ʿAllāmah's analysis.

Returning to the discussion of theological matters, Sūrah Sabaʾ models dialectical arguments on the topics of monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection. It takes its name from the people of Sabaʾ (not the Queen of Sheba, who is discussed in Sūrah al-Naml). Enjoying God's favour, the people of Sabaʾ fell into complacency and arrogance; therefore, their luxurious abodes were ruined, and they were scattered. Again, a valuable lesson for modern times.

This *sūrah* also speaks of David and Solomon, both of whom enjoyed command over creation; for instance, the mountains and birds praised God with David, and Solomon was gifted control over the wind and the jinn. These accounts echo the beliefs that a high level of piety and nearness to God enables an intimate link between the perfected human being and the creation; and that, far from being lifeless and inanimate, creation itself is alive and aware, in constant worship of God.

As with the previous volumes published by the Tawheed Institute (Australia), this translation is meticulous (if I may say so myself), with careful attention to detail and annotations by the translators. Despite the inherent complexity of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, efforts were made to make it as clear and fluid as possible. The tireless efforts, patience, and commitment of Ali Khalfan, the spearhead of this project, must be acknowledged in bringing yet another volume to fruition. It is the hope of all involved in this project that it is inspiring and educational to the reader.

Amina Inloes
January 2021

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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical

and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam*. The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 31

Sūrah Luqmān

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Verses 1-11

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

The focus of this sūrah, as its opening, conclusion, and general tenor suggest, is summoning people to believe in divine unity (*tawḥīd*), to have certainty in the Resurrection, and to adhere to the general teachings of the religion.

From the beginning of the sūrah, it appears that it was revealed concerning some of the polytheists who would prevent other people from listening to the Qur'an by spreading fanciful tales, as is indicated in reports about the occasion of revelation for the verse: *Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk that he may lead astray from Allah's way* (31:6). We will discuss this report in due course. In conclusion, the sūrah was revealed to expound some of the fundamental doctrines and teachings of the religion, and also to recount some details of the sage, Luqmān, and his wise sayings in response to the whimsical stories they were spreading.

Based on the tone of its verses, this sūrah was revealed in Mecca. One of its finest verses reads: *That is because Allah is the Reality, and whatever they invoke besides Him is nullity…* (31:30).

Commentary

الم ﴿١﴾ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣﴾
الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾
أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥﴾

(31:1–5) Alif, Lām, Mīm. ***These are the signs of the Wise Book, a guidance and mercy for the virtuous, who maintain the prayer,***

and pay the* zakāt*, and are certain of the Hereafter. Those follow their Lord's guidance, and it is they who are the felicitous.

We have already discussed the vocabulary of these verses in the previous sūrahs.

The Book is described as "wise" (*ḥakīm*) to indicate that it does not contain any vain speech; there is no space in it for vanity or falsehood. It is also described as a guidance (*hudā*) and a mercy (*raḥmah*) for the virtuous (*muḥsinīn*) because this represents the fulfilment of its wisdom; it not only guides people towards the true reality but conveys them to it. This is nothing like vain speech (*lahw al-kalām*), which is speech that distracts the human being from those things that should concern him. So it is a mercy, not a curse that deprives people of blessings.

The virtuous are then described as being those who maintain their prayers and pay the *zakāt*, as these are the two most important deeds. The fact they have certainty about the Hereafter means they must also have certainty about divine unity and prophethood, and be generally god-fearing in their behaviour. All of this draws a sharp contrast between the Book and the diversionary talk which prevents some people from hearing it.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْتَرِى لَهْوَ الْحَدِيثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

(31:6) ***Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk that he may lead astray from Allah's way without any knowledge, and he takes it in derision. For them there is a humiliating punishment.***

Diversion (*lahw*) refers to anything that distracts a person from those things that should concern him. Diversionary talk (*lahw al-ḥadīth*) refers to any talk whose nature is either to divert attention from the truth, such as mythical fables and vulgar tales, or to vie with it, such as poetry recitations, gatherings of vain amusement, or the playing of musical instruments. All of these could fall within the category of diversionary talk.

That he may lead astray from Allah's way without any knowledge: The context suggests that God's way (*sabīl allāh*) here signifies the Qur'an as it contains knowledge of the truth, and especially the accounts of the prophets and their peoples; diversionary talk and fanciful tales first and foremost clash with these accounts before undermining the other

teachings of truth in people's eyes.

This is supported by the phrase *he takes it in derision*, for diversionary talk, insofar as it is speech, first and foremost clashes with truthful speech and derides it.

Therefore, the meaning of *Allah's way* is the Qur'an itself, as it is the Qur'an that contains the stories of the prophets and the divine teachings. It appears as though the goal of *he who buys diversionary talk* is specifically to divert people away from the Qur'an, and to deride the Qur'an by making it appear as if its speech is of the same nature as his and its stories are of the same kind as his.

Without any knowledge (bi-ghayr ʿilmin) is connected to the verb *lead astray*, and it describes those who go astray rather than those who are leading them astray, even if the latter are also without knowledge. Then the Qur'an warns those who lead astray: *For such there is a humiliating punishment*—in other words, just as they deride the Qur'an, they too shall be derided and humiliated for their pride in this world.

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا وَلَّىٰ مُسْتَكْبِرًا كَأَنْ لَمْ يَسْمَعْهَا كَأَنَّ فِي أُذُنَيْهِ وَقْرًا ۖ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٧﴾

(31:7) *And when Our signs are recited to him, he turns away disdainfully as if he had not heard them, as if there were a blockage in his ears. So inform him of a painful punishment.*

This verse describes the one who buys diversionary talk to lead people away from the Qur'an and to deride it. A *blockage* (waqr) means a heavy load, as if he had filled is ears with something to prevent himself from hearing what is being said. Some have said this is an allusion to deafness.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that when God's signs (that is, the Qur'an) are recited to the one who buys diversionary talk, he turns away arrogantly as if he had not heard anything at all or as if he was utterly deaf. So give him good news of a painful punishment.

Some have said that, in the Arabic text, the one who buys diversionary talk is first referred to with a singular pronoun based on the word (*lafẓ*), but then with a plural pronoun based on its meaning (*maʿnā*), before returning again to a singular pronoun. However, it is also possible that *them* (-hum) in *for them there is a humiliating punishment* actually refers to both the person misguiding others and the people who are misguided

by him, as indicated by the context. In which case, the singular pronouns all refer to the one who buys diversionary talk.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٨﴾ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقًّا ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٩﴾

(31:8-9) ***As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, for them will be gardens of bliss, to remain in them. A true promise of Allah, and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

After warning the one who buys diversionary talk of a humiliating punishment and then of a painful punishment, the discourse returns to giving good tidings to the virtuous and reassuring them that they are promised paradise by God, and that His promise is true.

Insofar as the goal of the one who buys diversionary talk was to confuse those whom he led astray without knowledge, so that they would think the Qur'an was nothing more than a book of false legends like his own, and arrogantly refused to pay attention to the verses that were recited to him, out of disregard for God, the Qur'an first emphasizes that God's promise is true and then describes him as All-mighty, so that the audience will know that He is never humiliated, and as All-wise, so that they will know that His speech is without falsehood, idleness, or superstition.

Thirdly, in the next verse, the Qur'an describes Him as being the one who governs the affairs of the heavens and the earth, the plants, the animals, and the humans, because He is their Creator. Therefore, He is able to make them promises of paradise or punishment: *He created the heavens without any pillars that you may see, and cast firm mountains on the earth lest it should shake with you….*

خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ بِغَيْرِ عَمَدٍ تَرَوْنَهَا ۖ وَأَلْقَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ ۚ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿١٠﴾

(3:10) ***He created the heavens without any pillars that you see, and cast firm mountains on the earth lest it should shake with you, and He has scattered in it every kind of animal. And We sent down water from the sky and caused every splendid kind to grow in it.***

As we have already discussed in our explanation of the verse, *It is Allah who raised the heavens without any pillars that you see* (13:2), it is possible that the qualifier *that you see* (tarawnahā) could be a clarification (*tawḍīḥ*), meaning "the heavens have no pillars, as you can see", or it could be a specification (*iḥtirāz*), meaning "they were not created with visible pillars", the implication being that there are invisible pillars there.

And cast firm mountains on the earth lest it should shake with you—this implies that there is a direct connection between mountains and earthquakes.

And He has scattered in it every kind of animal—that is, all manner of animals that walk upon it.

And We sent down water from the sky and caused every splendid kind to grow in it—meaning We sent down water from above—meaning rain—and caused every kind of noble plant to grow (meaning plants which have some use or benefit associated with them). The word *kind* (*zawj*) also points to plants having genders, which we have discussed elsewhere.

Some say that the verse's transition from the third-person ("He") to the first-person ("We") is to show God's complete focus (*ʿināyah*) on this issue.

هَٰذَا خَلْقُ اللَّهِ فَأَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۚ بَلِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿١١﴾

(30:11) ***This is the creation of Allah. Now show me what others besides Him have created. Rather the wrongdoers are in manifest error!***

Having shown them His creation and governance of the heavens, the earth, and all they contain, and established His lordship and divinity, the Qur'an now challenges its audience to show what their gods have created if they are truly gods and lords. If they cannot find anything to show, then this proves God's absolute oneness in divinity and lordship.

But why does the Qur'an challenge them to do this when they admit that God alone is the creator[1] and do not claim that their gods are creators; they only attribute governance to them? This is because governance (*tadbīr*) is nothing other than creation (*khalq*); if their gods truly govern

1 See verse 29:61 (English vol. 31) and 31:25 which will come up in this volume. (Pub.)

the world, then that means they create what they govern, and if they have not created anything, then they govern nothing. So, there is no god except Allāh and there is no lord except Him.

The tone of this verse suggests that it is something that the Prophet said, as this kind of address—*Now show me what others besides Him have created*—is only appropriate from him.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, we read that the verse *Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk…* (31:6) was revealed about al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ᶜAlqamah ibn Kaladah ibn ᶜAbd al-Dār ibn Quṣayy ibn Kilāb. He was a trader that would go to Persia and purchase the tales of the Persians, then relate them to the Quraysh, saying: "Muḥammad recounts to you the tale of ᶜĀd and Thamūd, and I recount to you the tale of Rustam and Isfandiyār, and bring you the exploits of the Persian kings!" People would listen to his stories and ignore the Qur'an. This is narrated by al-Kalbī.

Author's comments: A narration to the same effect can be found in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Bayhaqī, from Ibn ᶜAbbās. It is not implausible that the whole sūrah could have been revealed for this reason, as we already discussed.

(2) In *Maᶜānī al-Akhbār*, Yaḥyā ibn ᶜUbādah narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq about *Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk…* (31:6):
This includes illicit singing (*ghināʾ*).

Author's comments: The same meaning has been narrated in *al-Kāfī* from Mihrān from the Imām and also from al-Washshāʾ from Imām al-Riḍā and from al-Ḥasan ibn Hārūn from him also.

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, Muḥammad ibn Muslim narrates that he heard Imām al-Bāqir say:
Illicit singing (*ghināʾ*) is something God has promised hellfire for. Then he recited the verse:
Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk that he may lead astray from Allah's way without any knowledge, and he takes it in derision. For them there is a humiliating punishment (31:6).

(4) In the same book, Abū Baṣīr recounts:

I asked Imām al-Bāqir about the earnings of songstresses (*mughanniyyāt*) and he said: "[The earnings of] one whom men visit are illicit, but there is no problem with the one who is invited to [sing at] weddings. This is God's saying: *Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk that he may lead astray from Allah's way…* (31:6)."

(5) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Abū Umāmah narrates from the Prophet:
It is not permitted to teach songstresses nor to sell them. Their fees are illicit [earnings]. This has been confirmed in God's book: *Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk…* (31:6).

Author's comments: This has also been narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from a large group of compilers of encyclopaedias of traditions, from Abū Umāmah, from the Prophet.

(6) In the same work, it is narrated that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:
It means to defame the truth and deride it. This is what Abū Jahl and his followers did when they said, "O assembly of the Quraysh! Shall I not feed you from the tree of *zaqqūm* with which your compatriot (that is, the Prophet) threatens you?" Then he sent for some butter and dates and said, "This is the fruit of *zaqqūm* that he threatens you with!"
The Imām added:
Illicit singing is also included in this.

(7) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā narrates from ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn:
A nation with lutes is not sanctified.

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Abū Jārūd narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq about the verse *Among the people is he who buys diversionary talk that he may lead astray from Allah's way without any knowledge* (31:6):
This refers to al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAlqamah ibn Kaladah, from the tribe of ʿAbd al-Dār ibn Quṣayy. Al-Naḍr would recount people's stories and poetry. God says: *And when Our signs are recited to him, he turns away disdainfully…* (31:7).

(9) In the same source, al-Qummī narrates from his father, from

al-Ḥusayn ibn Khālid:
I asked Imām al-Riḍā about the verse: *By the sky full of braids* (dhāt al-ḥubuk) (51:7). He told me: "It is braided (*maḥbuka*) to the earth." And he knitted his fingers together.
Then I asked: "How can it be braided to the earth when God says: *He raised the heavens without any pillars that you see* (31:10)?"
He said: "Glory to God! Does He not say: *Without any pillars that you see* (31:10)?"
I said: "Of course!"
He said: "So there are pillars, but you see them not!"

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Verses 12–19

These verses say that Luqmān was given wisdom and present a small sample of his teachings and advice to his son. The Qur'an only mentions him in this sūrah, which is apposite in this context as it contrasts his story, which is full of wisdom and good advice, to the speech of those who buy diversionary talk in order to lead others astray from God's way without knowledge and take it in derision.

Commentary

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا لُقْمَانَ الْحِكْمَةَ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِلَّهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَشْكُرْ فَإِنَّمَا يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾

(31:12) ***Certainly We gave Luqmān wisdom, to give thanks to Allah; and whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful, Allah is indeed all-sufficient, all-laudable.***

Based on how the term is used here and elsewhere, "wisdom" (*ḥikmah*) signifies useful knowledge, as opposed to ignorance (*jahl*) or pretence (*jurbuzah*).

Some say that *to give thanks to Allah* implies that God told him this, namely: "And we said: *give thanks to Allah*."

However, it appears that this is actually an explanation of what it means for God to grant him wisdom. This is because the essence of thanksgiving (*shukr*) is to make proper use of a blessing in such a way that points to the Source of this blessing. Accomplishing this in the manner God deserves depends on one having both knowledge of both the Source and the blessing, namely in what sense is it a blessing and how to make proper use of it in this way. So when God says He gave Luqmān wisdom, this means He inspired him to give thanks. This means that giving Luqmān wisdom includes bidding him to give thanks.

To give thanks to Allah contains a transition from the first-person ("We") to the third-person ("He"). This is because when a speaker talks to another person in the first-person plural, this displays his greatness by

speaking on behalf of himself and his servants. However, if he said "to give thanks to **U**s", this would clearly not suit divine unity in thanksgiving.

And whoever gives thanks, gives thanks only for his own sake. And whoever is ungrateful, Allah is indeed all-sufficient, all-laudable: Here, God says He does not need people to give Him thanks, because the benefits of the act of thanksgiving actually return to the person giving thanks. Equally, ingratitude only harms the one who is ungrateful—it does not harm God in the slightest. Therefore, whoever gives thanks only does so for his own benefit, as God does not benefit from it—because He is absolutely self-sufficient (*ghanī*)—for the same reason, whoever is ungrateful only harms himself. In other words, God derives no benefit or harm whether people give thanks or not. He is All-laudable (*ḥamīd*) because he is praised for the blessings He gives, regardless of how people receive them.

The Qur'an uses the present tense for thanksgiving to show that it is something continuous and the past tense for ingratitude to show that it happens on occasion. This implies that thanksgiving is only of benefit if it is continuous but that ingratitude is harmful even if it only happens once.

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٣﴾

(31:13) ***When Luqmān said to his son, as he advised him: O my son! Do not ascribe any partners to Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice.***

An action becomes great through the greatness of its effects, so the gravity of a misdeed comes from the gravity of its punishment. Therefore, the greatest of misdeeds is to disobey God because of His own unparalleled greatness and magnificence. He has no partner. Therefore the greatest act of disobedience against God is to ascribe to Him a partner.

Polytheism is indeed a great injustice (zulm ʿazīm)—because the Qur'an uses "great" (*ʿazīm*) without any qualification, this means it is great compared to all other sins. In other words, its gravity is immeasurable.

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٤﴾

(31:14) ***We have enjoined man concerning his parents: His mother***

carried him through weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return.

This is an aside in between the sayings being related from Luqmān and not part of Luqmān's own speech. It is only included here to indicate that the duty to be grateful to one's parents is like the duty to be grateful to God. In fact, it is part of giving thanks to God because this is something He has enjoined people to do. Therefore, giving thanks to one's parents is worshipping God, and worshipping God is giving thanks to Him.

His mother carried him through weakness upon weakness **(wahnan ʿalā wahnin)*****, and his weaning is in two years:*** Here God mentions some of the pain and hardship a mother endures in bearing and raising a child to motivate people to give thanks to their parents, especially their mothers.

Grammatically, *wahnan* is either a circumstantial modifier (*hāl*), meaning his mother was in a state of weakness, or it is an absolute object (*mafʿūl mutlaq*), in which case it means that she became weak.

"Weaning" (*fiṣāl*) means to stop suckling the child. Saying that it is *in two years* means that it takes two years; that is, suckling takes two years. If we consider this verse beside the verse *and his gestation and weaning take thirty months* (46:15), it means the minimum term for carrying a child is six months, and we will discuss this when we come to the verse in Sūrat al-Aḥqāf.

To give thanks to Me and to your parents: This explains what God has enjoined man to do, namely, "We commanded them to give thanks to their parents just as We commanded them to give thanks to God." *To Me is the return* is both a warning and an emphasis on the command to give thanks.

The transition in this verse from the first-person plural ("We") to the third-person ("he") has the same implication as in the verse above (31:12).

وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ۖ وَصَاحِبْهُمَا فِي الدُّنْيَا مَعْرُوفًا ۖ وَاتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ مَنْ أَنَابَ إِلَيَّ ۚ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(31:15) ***But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them. Keep their company honourably in this world and follow the way of him who turns to Me penitently. Then to Me will be your return, whereat I***

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will inform you concerning what you used to do.

This means that if your parents put pressure on you to do something you have no knowledge about regarding God's partners, then do not obey them and do not associate partners with God. The phrase, *of which you have no knowledge* shows that this partner is non-existent and therefore completely unknown because there can be no knowledge of what does not exist. In other words: "Do not associate with me that which is not a thing." This is a summary of what has been mentioned in *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*. This reading might find support with the verse: *Will you inform Allah about something He does not know in the heavens or on the earth?* (10:18)

Some have said that "to ascribe a partner" (*tushrik*) means "to disbelieve" (*takfur*), such that the meaning becomes, "If they urge you to disbelieve in me in a way for which you have no argument, then do not obey them." This reading is supported by the repeated disavowal of such a partner having any authority in the verse, *You do not worship besides Him but names that you and your fathers have invented, for which Allah has not sent down any authority* (12:40) and in other verses.

Keep their company honourably in this world and follow the way of him who turns to Me penitently: These two statements are almost a succinct explanation of everything that the two verses before have covered with regards to honouring one's parents but not obeying them if they urge you to associate partners with God.

Here, God says: The human being must keep company with his parents in worldly matters aside from religion, which is the way of God. This must be done honourably and kindly, not harshly or unpleasantly. A person must bear the difficulties he faces on their account, for this world is but a fleeting number of days. If a person's parents are of those who turn penitently to God, then he or she may follow their way, otherwise he or she must follow the path of someone else who does.

This brings out the subtlety in the phrase *follow the way of him who turns to Me penitently* as this could describe a person's parents, in which case he or she should follow them, or it could not, in which case he or she must follow the way of someone else who does turn to God penitently.

Then to Me will be your return, whereat I will inform you concerning what you used to do: In other words: What I have said here is your responsibility in this world. When you come back to Me on the Day of Judgement, I will show you the reality of the deeds that you did in this

world, and I will judge between you on the basis of these deeds.

The phrase, *in this world* (fī al-dunyā) in *keep their company honourably in this world* would appear to serve three purposes; first, it makes clear that this only applies to worldly affairs and not religious ones; second, if keeping them company is difficult, it makes this seem trivial as it is only in this world, which is a matter of a few fleeting days. Therefore, there is not a lot of difficulty in looking after them; third, it stands in juxtaposition with the day on which a person returns to God, referred to later in the verse by the phrase: *Then to Me will be your return*….

يَا بُنَيَّ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي
السَّمَاوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٦﴾

(31:16) ***O my son! Even if it should be*** **(innahā in taku)** ***the weight of a mustard seed, and though it should be in a rock, or in the heavens, or on the earth, Allah will produce it. Indeed, Allah is all-attentive, all-aware.***

Commentators have said that the pronoun *it* (-hā) refers to good and evil, as suggested by the context, and that it is also the subject of *kāna* ["be"/*taku* in the verse], whose predicate is *the weight of a mustard seed* (mithqāl ḥabbah). *Thought it should be in a rock* refers to it being hidden inside a solid rock, or hidden in the heavens or the earth. *Produce it* means that he will bring it out to be counted in a person's judgement and given recompense for.

The part of Luqmān's speech immediately prior to this was concerned with God's unity and disavowing any partner to Him. Therefore, this verse represents a different part of his speech that is concerned with the Resurrection and Judgement. It means: "O my son! Even if the slightest good or evil you have done is the most hidden and hard to find of things, like a single mustard seed, and that mustard seed is hidden inside a rock, or anywhere in the heavens or the earth, God will bring it out to be counted and He will recompense you for it, for God is supremely attentive—meaning His knowledge penetrates to the depths of things and reaches even that which is most hidden—and supremely aware—meaning He knows the essence of all things."

يَا بُنَيَّ أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَانْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا

أَصَابَكَ ۖ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ ﴿١٧﴾

(31:17) ***O my son! Maintain the prayer and bid what is right and forbid what is wrong and be patient through whatever may visit you. That is indeed the steadiest of courses.***

This verse and those that follow deal with a selection of righteous deeds and virtuous morals. One such deed is prayer (*ṣalāt*), which is the pillar of the faith, and this is followed by enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. The virtues include patience (*ṣabr*) in times of affliction.

That is indeed the steadiest of courses: *That* refers to patience, and the distant form of demonstrative pronoun (as opposed to the near form, "this") is used to magnify and elevate it. Some say *that* refers to everything mentioned before, including prayer, enjoining the good and patience. However, this is not the case, as God repeatedly describes patience as *the steadiest of courses* (min ʿazm al-amūr); see the verses: *As for him who endures patiently and forgives that is indeed the steadiest of courses.* (42:43) and *…but if you are patient and Godwary, that is indeed the steadiest of courses* (3:186).

According to al-Rāghib, the Arabic word *ʿazm* means to set one's heart upon accomplishing something. Patience (*ṣabr*), defined as restraining oneself from something, is a form of *ʿazm* insofar as so long as one's heart is set upon a goal, a person will remain steadfast upon it. Therefore, patience—insofar as it is one of the abilities of the soul—is essential for keeping one's heart set upon something.

Those who read *min ʿazm al-umūr* as meaning that "this is one of God's resolute commands (*ʿazīmah*)" are off the mark, as are those who say that *ʿazm* is synonymous with *jazm* ("certainty") in the dialect of Hudhayl.

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴿١٨﴾

(31:18) ***Do not turn your cheek askew*** **(lā tuṣaʿir khaddak)** ***from the people, and do not walk exultantly on the earth. Indeed, Allah does not like any swaggering braggart.***

According to al-Rāghib, *saʿar* ("to be askew") means to twist the neck and *taʿṣīr* ("to turn askew") means to twist one's neck to avoid looking at

someone or something out of disdain, as in the above verse. "Exultance" (*maraḥ*) means to be excessively pleased with one's self.

Based on this, the verse means: Do not turn your face away from the people disdainfully, nor walk upon the earth out of excessive happiness, for God does not like the conceited and the proud.

Some have suggested that *Do not turn your cheek askew* means not to bend one's neck to them in humility when asking for something, but this does not fit with the rest of the verse.

وَاقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَاغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ ۚ إِنَّ أَنْكَرَ الْأَصْوَاتِ لَصَوْتُ الْحَمِيرِ ﴿١٩﴾

(31:19) ***Be modest in your bearing and lower your voice. Indeed, the ungainliest of voices is the donkey's voice.***

"To be modest" (*qaṣd*) in something means to be moderate, and "to lower" (*ghaḍḍ*)—according to al-Rāghib—means to diminish. Therefore "to lower one's voice" means to diminish its volume.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: Take a moderate bearing when walking and lower your voice when speaking, for the most despised sound is that of a donkey because of its excessive volume.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Sinān narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
It is a major sin to disrespect one's parents, to despair of God's kindness, or to feel safe from God's devising.
It has also been narrated:
The greatest sin is to associate partners with God.

(2) In *al-Faqīḥ*, one of the rights (*ḥuqūq*) narrated from Imām Zayn al-ᶜĀbidīn is:
God's greatest right over you is that you worship Him and associate nothing with Him. If you do that with sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), God will make it incumbent upon Himself to suffice you in the affairs of this world and the hereafter.
As for the right of your mother, it is for you to know that she carried you like no other, and gave you from the yield of her heart like no other, and protected you with all of her limbs. She

went hungry to feed you. She went thirsty to quench you. She went naked to clothe you. She endured the sun to shade you. She stayed awake at nights for you. She shielded you from heat and cold so that you could be hers. So you can never thank her except by God's grace and assistance.

As for the right of your father, it is that you know he is your progenitor. Were it not for him, you would not exist. So whenever you see something of yourself that pleases you, know that your father is the source of that blessing for you. So praise God and give thanks to him to the extent of that, and there is no strength save with God.

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, Hishām ibn Sālim narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq:

A man came to the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God! To whom should I be dutiful?"

He said, "Your mother."

"Then to whom?"

"Your mother."

"Then to whom?"

"Your mother."

"Then to whom?"

"Your father."

(4) In *al-Manāqib*, it is narrated:

Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī passed ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, whereat the latter remarked, "Whoever desires to see the inhabitant of earth most beloved to the inhabitants of the heavens, let them look to this passer-by! I have not spoken to him since the nights of Ṣiffīn."

Then Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī came to Ḥusayn, who asked him, "Do you fight my father and I at Ṣiffīn, although you know I am the most beloved inhabitant of this earth to the inhabitants of the heavens, and my father—by God!—is better than me."

Abū Saʿīd tried to excuse his behavior by saying, "The Prophet told me to obey my father."

Ḥusayn replied, "Have you not heard God's words: *But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no*

knowledge, then do not obey them (31:15)? God's Messenger also said: 'Obedience is only in good things' and 'there is no obedience to the creation in disobeying the Creator!'"

(5) In *al-Faqīh*, we also read the short saying of the Prophet:
There is no obeying the created in disobeying the Creator!

(6) In *al-Kāfī*, Abū Baṣīr narrates he heard Imām al-Bāqir say:
Beware the sins that are thought trivial (*al-muhaqqarāt min al-dhunūb*) for they will be sought out. One of you might say, "I will sin and repent." But God says: *[We] record what they have sent forth and what they have left behind. And we have kept an account of all things in a clear registry (*imām*)* (36:12), and He says: *Even if it should be the weight of a mustard seed, and though it should be in a rock, or in the heavens, or on the earth, Allah will produce it. Indeed Allah is all-attentive, all-aware.* (31:16)

(7) Also, in *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from Muʿāwiyah ibn Wahb:
I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq, "What is the best means through which God's servants can attain nearness to Him, and what is the dearest means to Him?"
He said, "I know nothing after knowledge (*maʿrifah*) better than this: prayer (*ṣalāt*)."

(8) In the same source, Muḥammad ibn Fuḍayl narrates from Imām al-Riḍā:
Prayer is the offering (*qurbān*) of every pious person.

(9) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:
And be patient through whatever (31:17) difficulty (*mashaqqah*) or persecution (*adhā*) *may visit you* when enjoining the good and forbidding the evil—narrated from ʿAlī.

(10) In the same source, we read:
Do not turn your cheek askew from the people (31:18), meaning do not turn your face away from a person completely and do not turn away from someone who is talking to you to belittle them. This

interpretation is from Ibn ʿAbbās and Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(11) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ṭabrānī, Ibn ʿUdayy, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī that the Prophet was asked about the verse *Do not turn your cheek askew from the people* (31:8). He said:
[It means: to expose] the side of your jaw [to them].

(12) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, about the verse *Indeed the ungainliest of voices is the donkey's voice* (31:19), it is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
It is the sound of a loud and vulgar sneeze, or a man who raises his voice uncouthly when speaking, unless he is supplicating or reciting the Qur'an.

Author's comments: There is an abundance of narrations on all of these topics, especially on disrespecting one's parents.

A Discussion on the Story of Luqmān and his Wisdom, in Two Parts

Part 1

Firstly, the name Luqmān does not appear anywhere in the Qur'an aside from Sūrat Luqmān, and we are told nothing about him save *Certainly We gave Luqmān wisdom…* (31:12). On the other hand, a variety of traditions have been narrated about his story and his wisdom, of which we will present a few that we deem to be more reliable.

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, some of our colleagues relate (without a chain of narration) from Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam:
Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar said to me, "O Hishām! God says *Certainly We gave Luqmān wisdom* (31:12)—meaning understanding (*fahm*) and intelligence (*ʿaql*)."

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Nāfiʿ narrates from Ibn ʿUmar that he heard God's Messenger say:
Truly, I say to you that Luqmān was not a prophet. Rather he was a servant who pondered much and drew good conclusions. He loved God, so God loved him and blessed him with wisdom… He was asleep one afternoon, when he was woken by a call: "O

Luqmān! Would you like God to make you a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on the earth, that you might judge between people with truth?"
Luqmān answered the voice: "If my Lord gives me any choice, then I would prefer to be released (*ʿāfiyah*) and avoid tribulation (*balāʾ*). If He insists, then I hear and obey, for I know that if He does that to me, He will support me and protect me [from error.]"
The angels responded with their voices, though he could not see them: "Why is that, O Luqmān?"
He said, "Because to govern (*al-ḥukm*) is the gravest of stations and the most severe. It is beset by wrongdoing from every angle, even if he is faithful. It is better to be saved, for if he slips, then he slips from the path to paradise. One who is humiliated (*dhalīl*) in this world and ennobled (*sharīf*) in the next is better off than the one who is ennobled in this world and humiliated in the next, and whoever chooses this world over the next will lose this world and miss the next."
The angels were amazed by his speech (*manṭiq*), so he fell asleep again, and while he slept, God gave him wisdom and he awoke uttering it. He would advise David with his wisdom, such that David said, "Bless you, O Luqmān! You were given wisdom and protected from tribulation!"

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Abū Hurayrah:
God's Messenger said, "Do you know who Luqmān was?"
The people said, "God and His Messenger know best!"
He said, "He was an Abyssinian (*ḥabashī*)."

Part two

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Ḥammād narrates:
I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about Luqmān and his wisdom, as God describes in the Qurʾan.
He told me, "By God, Luqmān was not only given wisdom without wealth, family, strength, or beauty! Rather he was a man who was strong in fulfilling God's commands, devoted to God, quiet and calm, of deep reflection, prone to reflecting at length and with sharp discernment. He learnt from experience, never sleeping

during the day. No one ever caught sight of him defecating, urinating, or bathing because of how assiduously he guarded his privacy, his deep insight, and his precaution in daily affairs. He never laughed lest he sin, nor did he ever grow angry or mock another person. He did not become glad at anything he was given from this world, nor did he grieve for any of it. He married women and had many children, but outlived most of them by many years. However, he did not weep for the death of any of them.

"He did not pass two men quarrelling or fighting without settling affairs between them and he did not live them until they were friends. He never heard any words he thought goodly without asking what they meant and from whom the speaker had heard them. He would sit abundantly with men of understanding and wisdom, and avoid judges, kings, and rulers. He would pity the judges for what they endured and kings and rulers because of their heedlessness of God and their satisfaction with this. He would learn the methods to overcome his low self (*nafs*) and use it to wrestle with his desires and protect himself from Satan. He would treat his heart with thought (*fikr*) and his soul with reflection (*ʿibr*), and he would not involve himself in what did not concern him. For this reason, he was given wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and granted protection (*ʿismah*) [from sinning.]

"When it was the middle of the day and the eyes had become still, napping, God dispatched companies of angels [to Luqmān]. They called out to him so that he could hear them but not see them: 'O Luqmān! Would you like God to make you a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) upon the earth that you might judge between people?'

"Luqmān answered, 'If God has commanded that, then I hear and obey because if He does that He will help me, teach me, and protect me [from erring] that I might accomplish it. But, if He has given me the choice, then I would prefer to be released.'

"The angels said, 'O Luqmān, why?'

"He said, 'Because judging between people is the gravest of positions and the worst kind of tribulation. It is a lonesome and treacherous post, beset by wrongdoing from every corner! And the one who judges is forever between two affairs, even if he goes aright. It is better to be saved, for if he slips here, he slips from the path to paradise. Whoever is weak and abased in this world

will have it easier on the Day of Resurrection compared to one who has authority and nobility. And whoever chooses this world over the next will lose both of them; one will pass away and the other will evade his grasp.'

"The angels were amazed by his wisdom and God thought his speech (*manṭiq*) goodly, so when he went to bed that evening God sent down wisdom upon him and it covered him from head to toe while he slept until he was completely enveloped in wisdom. Then, when he awoke, he was the wisest of men in his time; he went out to the people uttering wisdom and spreading it amongst them.

"And when he refused to take God's offer of vicegerency (*khilāfah*), God told the angels to go to David and offer it to him. He accepted it without stipulating the conditions that Luqmān had, so God gave him the position of vicegerent upon the earth and tried him with it more than once. Whenever that was about to make him err, God nullified that and forgave him. Luqmān would visit David often and admonish him with his wisdom, teachings, and abundant knowledge. David would say to him, 'Bless you, O Luqmān! You were given wisdom and saved from tribulation, while David was given authority and tried with judgement and tribulation!'"

Then Imām al-Ṣādiq said about the verse *When Luqmān said to his son, as he advised him: O my son! Do not ascribe any partners to Allah. Polytheism is indeed a great injustice* (31:13): "Luqmān advised his son until his son followed in his tracks, and—O Ḥammād!—one of the pieces of advice he gave to his son was: 'O my son! From the moment you fall into this world, turn your back on it and face the next world, for the abode to which you are headed approaches, and the abode from whence you came recedes. O my son! Keep company with people of learning, sit close to them, and do not dispute with them lest they send you away. Take what you need from this world and do not reject it, lest you become a burden on others [for your needs], but do not enter it in a way that will be to the detriment of your hereafter. Fast to the extent that you restrain your lusts but not to the extent that you are restrained from prayer, for verily prayer is dearer to God than fasting.

"'O my son! This world is a deep ocean in which many have perished. So make your vessel upon it faith (*īmān*), and make its

sail reliance (*tawakkul*), and make your provision Godwariness (*taqwā allāh*). If you survive, it will be by God's mercy, and if you perish, it will be by your own sins.

"'O my son! If you educate yourself while you are young, you will benefit from it when you are old. One who cares for education will pay attention to it, and one who pays attention to it will make learning it his goal, and one who makes learning it his goal will go to any lengths to seek it, and one who will go to any lengths to seek it will profit from it. So make it your habit, for you will leave a legacy from which those who come after you will benefit, and others will seek you out and be in awe of you because of it. But beware of flagging by seeking something else, for even if you conquer this world you cannot conquer the next; and even if you search for knowledge in its proper place but cannot find it, you shall still have the hereafter. Be sure to set aside some time from your days and nights to seek knowledge, for there is no loss greater than the loss of learning. Do not vie about it with the obstinate, nor dispute with a man of understanding, nor make an enemy of a ruler, nor walk alongside an oppressor or keep his friendship. Do not take a sinner as a brother, nor be a companion of one whose character is suspect. Treasure your knowledge as you treasure your wealth.

"'O my son! Be fearful of God such that even if you stand before Him on the Day of Judgement with all the good deeds of jinn and men, you would still fear his punishment. And have hope in God such that even if you stand before Him on the Day of Judgement with all the sins of jinn and men, you would still hope for His forgiveness!'

"His son told him, 'O father! How can I do all this when I have but one heart?'

"Luqmān told him, 'O my son! If you brought out a believer's heart you would find two lights in it—a light for fear and a light for hope—and if you weighed them on scales, you would see that neither of them outweighed the other by so much as an atom's weight. Whoever has faith in God believes in what He says, and whoever believes in what God says will do as God commands, and whoever does not do what God commands does not believe what He says. These morals bear witness to one another.

"'Therefore, whoever truly has faith in God will act sincerely for

the sake of God, and whoever acts sincerely for the sake of God has truly had faith in God. Whoever obeys God fears him, and whoever fears God has loved Him, and whoever loves Him has followed His command, and whoever follows His command has earned paradise and His satisfaction. But whoever does not seek God's satisfaction (*riḍwān*) has disparaged His wrath, and we seek refuge from God's wrath!

"'O my son! Do not rely on this world or occupy your heart with it, for God has created nothing more trivial to him than it. Do you not see that he has not made its blessings a reward for the virtuous or its hardships a punishment for the sinners?'"

(2) In *Qurb al-Isnād*, Hārūn narrates from Ibn Ṣadaqah from Jaʿfar, from his father [Imām al-Bāqir]:

Luqmān was asked, "What have you surmised from your wisdom?"

He replied, "I do not burden myself where I have sufficed, nor squander what I am responsible for."

(3) In *Biḥār*, from *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, Jābir narrates from Imām al-Bāqir:

One of the lessons Luqmān taught his son was: "O my son! If you are in doubt about death, then prevent yourself from sleeping. You cannot do that. And if you are in doubt about the Resurrection, prevent yourself from waking up. You cannot do that. Therefore, if you ponder on this you will realize that your self is in another's hand, and that sleep is like death, and that waking up is like being raised from the dead."

Then Luqmān told his son, "O my son! Do not draw near, lest what you seek pulls away. But neither withdraw, lest you become insignificant. Every beast loves its likeness, but the son of Adam does not love his. Do not present your wares except to him that seeks them. And just as there can be no camaraderie between the sheep and the wolves, neither can there be between the righteous and the profligate. If you touch black pitch, it will cling to you, and if you associate with a profligate, he will influence you. Whoever likes a hypocrite will be reviled, whoever enters a disreputable door will be suspect, whoever keeps an evil associate is never safe, and whoever cannot control his tongue will regret.

"O my son! Keep a hundred friends but do not make one enemy! O my son! There is only your nobility and your character; your nobility is your religion and your character is between you and the people, so do not detest them but learn the best of morals!
"O my son! Be a servant to good people and do not be an errand boy for evil ones. Oy my son! Deliver your trusts and secure yourself in this world and the next, and be trustworthy for God does not like the perfidious. O my son! Do not make a show of fearing God to the people while your heart is reprobate."

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, Yaḥyā ibn ʿUqbah al-Azadī narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
One of the things Luqmān told his son was: "O my son! People before you amassed [wealth] for their children—in the end neither what they amassed remained nor whom they amassed it for. You, on the other hand, are a hired servant (*ʿabd mustaʾjar*) who has been told to do a job and promised a wage. So do your job and you will receive your wage. Do not be like a sheep in this world, standing idly in a lush field and eating until you are fat, as that is when you are ripe for slaughter! Instead make this world like a boat that sails upon a river; you rode upon it and then disembarked, and you will never ride it again before it is ruined by age. Do not build upon this world, for you have not been told to build upon it.
"And know that when you stand before God tomorrow, you will asked about four things: your youth and how you endured it, your life and how you used it, and your wealth and from whence you obtained it and on what you spent it. So have your answers ready! And do not despair for what escapes you of this world, for what little this world has does not last, though it abounds in tribulations. So be on your guard, be resolute in your course, pull back the veil from your face, and pursue the good of your Lord. Repent continuously in your heart and be on your way before you reach your destination. Fulfil what you owe of worship and restrain yourself from what you desire."

(5) In *Biḥār al-Anwār*, also from *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*:
Ḥammāḍ narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq that Luqmān said, "O my son! Beware of vexation, ill manners, and impatience, as no one

with these qualities will go aright. Resolve yourself to be calm in your affairs, patient with the demands of your brethren, and good mannered with all people.

"O my son! Even if you are deprived of the means to keep your relations and be generous to your friends, do not let yourself be deprived of pleasant manners and good cheer, for the one with good manners is loved by good people and avoided by the reprobate. Be satisfied with what God assigns to you so that you live a clean life. And even if you wish to amass all the honour in this world, do not covet what is in people's hands, for the prophets and the veracious only attained their stations by restraining their ambitions."

Author's comments: There are abundant narrations on Luqmān's advice and wise sayings, and we have restricted ourselves to just a few here for the sake of brevity.

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Verses 20–34

After the story of Luqmān, the discourse returns to the signs of God's oneness and the absence of any partner for Him, which it left off at the verse *This is the creation of Allah. Now show Me what others besides Him have created. Rather the wrongdoers are in manifest error!* (31:11)

Commentary

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعَمَهُ ظَاهِرَةً وَبَاطِنَةً ۗ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

(31:20) ***Do you not see that Allah has disposed for you* (lakum)** ***whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is on the earth and He has showered upon you His blessings, the apparent and the hidden? Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning Allah without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture.***

This verse signifies a return to the discussion before the story of Luqmān, and it shows that the sūrah is addressed to the idol-worshippers, although the end of the verse suggests a general audience. Therefore, the first part of the verse would be the continuation of the Prophet's words that were being related immediately before the story: *This is the creation of Allah. Now show Me what others besides Him have created*, which also means there is no transition in addressee (*iltifāt*) when it says: *Do you not see…?*

On the other hand, if we say that the speaker in the verse is God, then *Do you not see…?* is a transition in addressee, from the third-person ("they") in *…Rather the wrongdoers are in manifest error!* (31:11) to the second-person ("you" pl.). In this context, such a transition reflects the speaker's exasperation at the ignorance and obstinacy of those He to whom he speaks, as no amount of evidence or prompting makes a difference to

them. Therefore, he presents them with something that is immediately accessible to them so that perhaps they will come to their senses.

This refers to the connections we can perceive between the different parts of the world within the natural order that governs the cosmos in general and governs the human being in particular; the human being is the noblest constituent of the physical universe because of his awareness and his will, and therefore God has disposed the cosmos for his sake.

"To dispose" (*taskhīr*) means to compel an instrument (*fāʿil*) to act in accordance with one's wishes, as, for instance, the writer disposes the pen or the master disposes the servant to act, of the latter's own free-will, in accordance with his wishes. The natural order, whatever it may be, follows God's will, and this is the order that governs the human realm.

From the above, it appears that the *lām* ("for") in *lakum* is purposive (*ghāʾī*), meaning "for your sake" and the one who makes use of the heavens and the earth is God (that is, "It is God who makes use of the heavens and the earth for your sake"). On the other hand, it is also possible that the *lām* is for ownership, meaning "to you", and the one who makes use of the heavens and the earth is the human being by God's leave (that is, "It is God who has placed the heavens and the earth at your disposal."), as reflected in the fact that as human civilization has grown and developed, human beings have gradually brought more of the world under their dominion and made use of it for their own benefit. However, this second reading does not fit with the opening of the verse, namely *Do you not see…?*

And He has showered upon you His blessings, the apparent and the hidden: "To shower" (*isbāgh*) means to supplement and expand, meaning "He has supplemented and expanded His blessings for you." "Blessings" (*niʿam*) is the plural of *niʿmah*, which means anything beneficial that the human being enjoys. *The apparent and the hidden* blessings, based on the fact that this is addressed to the polytheists, refer to—in the case of the apparent– the senses, such as hearing and sight, the limbs, health, wellbeing, and—in the case of the hidden—sustenance and good things that are not perceptible directly by the senses, such as awareness, will, and intellect.

However, if we take this to be addressed to everyone, then the apparent blessings are those which are perceptible to the senses, as mentioned above, or religion, which arranges the affairs of this world and the hereafter. Meanwhile, the hidden blessings include the ones already mentioned above, but also include spiritual blessings such as the stations people

achieve through acts of sincerity.

Yet among the people are those who dispute concerning Allah without any knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture: The tone suggests that the address now returns to the Prophet. "To dispute" (*mujādalah*) means to engage in theoretical arguments to overcome the other party. The association of knowledge, guidance, and scripture suggests that what is meant by "knowledge" (*ʿilm*) here is that which has been obtained from rational proofs; by "guidance" (*hudā*), that which has been bestowed by God via revelation or inspiration; and by "scripture" (*kitāb*), the divine scripture which has been sent by God through revelation to the Prophets, which is why he describes it as "illuminating" (*munīr*). These are the three paths to knowledge—there is no fourth.

Therefore, *who dispute concerning Allah without* these things means that they dispute about His oneness, His lordship, and His divinity without any proof. Rather, they just follow what other people are saying.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا ۚ
أَوَلَوْ كَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ يَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٢١﴾

(31:21) ***When they are told, Follow what Allah has sent down, they say, We will rather follow what we found our fathers following. What! Even if Satan be calling them to the punishment of the Blaze?***

The pronoun *they* refers to the meaning of "those" in *among the people are those* in the previous verse, just as the Arabic pronouns in that verse were singular based on the word *man.*

When they are told, Follow what Allah has sent down: Here, God chooses *what Allah has sent down* rather than "follow the Book" or "follow the Qur'an" to show that this summons is not dogmatic, but is based on proof, because the fact that the Book has come from God is demonstrated by the proofs of prophethood. It is as if God is saying: "When they are summoned to the religion of divine unity by the scripture that has certainly been sent down by God…" or, to put it in more universal terms: "When they are presented with arguments and evidence, they respond with baseless dogma and say: 'We will follow what we found our fathers following.'"

What! Even if Satan be calling them to the punishment of the Blaze?

This is a rhetorical question meant as a rebuke, meaning: "Will they follow their fathers even if this is Satan calling them to the punishment of the Blaze?"

Even if… (*law*) here is conjunctive (*waṣliyyah*) and is joined to an implicit statement that is similar to the clause that follows it and has the meaning: "Would they follow them if Satan was not calling them and even if he was?"

To summarize: It is only good to follow someone if they are upon the truth, but when they are themselves following falsehood, and following them leads only to misery and punishment, then following them is like worshipping someone other than God, and there is none worthy of worship save Him.

وَمَنْ يُسْلِمْ وَجْهَهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ ۗ
وَإِلَى اللَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٢٢﴾

(31:22) ***Whoever surrenders his countenance to Allah and is virtuous has certainly held fast to the firmest handle, and with Allah lies the outcome of all matters.***

This is a new discussion, though it could also be a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for the object (*mafʿūl*) of *calling them* (yadʿūhum), in which case the pronoun refers to them, giving the meaning: "Even if Satan be calling them… while whoever surrenders his countenance to God… is saved and will succeed, as all affairs return to God and, therefore, only He should be worshipped."

To "surrender one's countenance" (*islām al-wajh*) to God means for the human being to turn to God with the entirety of his being and to turn away from everyone except Him. "Virtue" (*iḥsān*) means to do righteous deeds based out of certainty regarding the hereafter. This is explained at the beginning of the sūrah: *a guidance and mercy for the virtuous, who maintain the prayer, and pay the zakāt, and are certain of the Hereafter* (31:3–4). The "firmest handle" means a hold that will never break.

This renders the meaning: "Whoever believes God is one and acts righteously with certainty about the Hereafter will be saved and will never perish at the outcome of his affair, as this is in God's hands, and it is He whom promises him salvation and success."

Hence it appears that the coda, *and with Allah lies the outcome of all*

matters serves to explain the rationale for *has certainly held fast to the firmest handle*.

وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَلَا يَحْزُنْكَ كُفْرُهُ ۚ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَنُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا عَمِلُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٢٣﴾ نُمَتِّعُهُمْ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ نَضْطَرُّهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(31:23–24) ***As for those who are faithless, let their faithlessness not grieve you. To Us will be their return, and We will inform them about what they have done. Indeed Allah knows best what is in the breasts. We will provide for them for a short time, then We will shove them toward a harsh punishment.***

These verses console the Prophet so that he will not be overtaken by grief and reassure him that they will return to God in the hereafter and He will inform them of what they have done—meaning He will make the reality and consequences of their deeds visible to them, which are embodied by hellfire.

We will provide for them for a short time, then We will shove them toward a harsh punishment: This is another way of saying that He will reveal their true state to them. The previous explanation—*To Us will be their return, and We will inform them about what they have done*—might suggest that so long as they are living comfortably in this world, they are beyond God's power, and it is only when they die or are resurrected that He may act against them and punish them for their deeds. Therefore, the next verse reveals that they are never beyond God's governance; He is merely providing for them in this world for a while before He takes them to a harsh punishment. In other words, they are completely within His power in any situation; their affair is always God's and they can never thwart God, whether they are living comfortably or otherwise.

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۚ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(31:25) ***If you ask them, Who created the heavens and the earth? they will surely say, Allah. Say: All praise belongs to Allah! Yet most of them do not know.***

This verse points to the fact that not only it is human nature (*fiṭrah*) to believe in divine unity, but the polytheists themselves confess to this without realizing it because if they are asked who created the heavens and the earth, they readily acknowledge that it was God. And if God is the creator of the cosmos, then He is also its governor because governance is inseparable from creation. And if God is the one who governs the affairs of the cosmos and the granter of blessings, which He expands and contracts, and who is hoped-for and feared, then He is the sole object of worship and has no partner. In other words, they have admitted there is only one God without realizing it.

This is why God commands His Messenger to praise God upon hearing their unwitting confession of faith: *Say, All praise belongs to Allah!* before saying that most of them do not grasp the significance of their acknowledgement of God as the creator and all that it entails: *Yet most of them do not know.* Of course, a small number of them understand fully what this means, but they refuse to yield to the truth. Instead, they choose to be obstinate, as God says elsewhere: *They impugned them though they were convinced in their hearts wrongfully and defiantly.* (27:14)

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٦﴾

(31:26) ***To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. Indeed Allah is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.***

The polytheists' confession that God is the creator only establishes His oneness in lordship and divinity if the governance and disposing of the cosmos is also solely in his hands. However, the fact that He is the creator is enough to entail all of this, but He mentions it in order to complete the argument. Then he calls on the Prophet to praise Him while bemoaning that the people are ignorant because of their own heedlessness.

Then He initiates a second line of argument, namely that true sovereignty of the cosmos is only in His hands because He is absolutely sufficient (*ghanī*) and utterly praiseworthy (*maḥmūd*). The reasoning of this argument is as follows: God is the source of every creation and the granter of every excellence, so He possesses everything that existent things need. In other words, He is absolutely sufficient, for were this not the case He could not be the source of created things or the granter of their excellences, which would violate our original premise.

Then, if God is absolutely sufficient, then everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him, and therefore He is the absolute sovereign over all things. This means He can dispose things as He pleases, and that everything that happens in the cosmos is under His direction. And if anything was under the direction of a being other than Him, then that other being would be the sovereign of that thing and He would not be the absolute sovereign of all, which would violate our original premise. Therefore, in that He has complete control of the universe, He is the Lord of the Worlds and the only God who is worshipped and thanked for His blessings and kindness.

This is what God alludes to when He says *To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. Indeed Allah is the All-sufficient…—To Allah belongs…* is the proof of His oneness, and *Indeed Allah is the All-sufficient…* explains why He has sovereignty over all things.

As for *the All-laudable*, this means that He is praised in his actions and represents the source of another argument, namely that praise is given when someone does something beautiful by their own volition. Every beautiful thing in this world belongs to God and, therefore, all praise ultimately returns to Him. In other words, He is praised absolutely. Were there anything of the finely-tuned natural order that had come from other than Him, without any relation to Him, then praise would not have belonged to Him in its entirety, which would violate our original premise.

وَلَوْ أَنَّمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَامٌ وَالْبَحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أَبْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

(31:27) ***If the trees of the earth were pens, and the sea replenished with seven more seas, the words of Allah would not be spent. Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-wise.***

In the context of *If…* (*law*), the phrase, *the trees of the earth* signifies *every* tree on the earth, and *the sea* means the sea in its entirety. *Replenished with seven more seas* means that if the sea in its entirety were multiplied sevenfold. It appears that *seven* here is simply being used to mean "an abundance" rather than a specific number. *Words* (kalimāt) means an utterance which carries a meaning. In the Qur'an, *word* can also refer to what comes into being by His command, as in *Whenever He wills something, he says to it Be! and it is* (36:82) and to Jesus: *The Messiah, Jesus son*

of Mary, was only an apostle of Allah, and His Word that He cast toward Mary… (4:171).

The meaning of the verse is: "Even if the trees of the earth were made into pens and the sea were taken and multiplied sevenfold before being turned into ink, and the words of God were written by those pens from that ink, the ocean would dry up before God's words were exhausted, because the words of God are never-ending."

Based on this, we can see that the verse has been kept succinct by omitting some details, and that the phrase *Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-wise* serves as an explanation for what came before it. In other words: Because God is all-mighty and there is nothing that can overcome Him, whatever is from Him cannot be exhausted by this writing, and because He is all-wise, he does not delegate the direction of the cosmos to anyone else.

This verse is connected to the one before it in that it highlights that the direction of the Creation is His alone. In this context, the verse points to the extent of his dominion, and the abundance of his cosmic commands, such that even if the ocean were multiplied sevenfold and transformed into ink, and all the trees on the earth were made into pens, they would be exhausted before His commands and words were.

مَا خَلْقُكُمْ وَلَا بَعْثُكُمْ إِلَّا كَنَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(31:28) ***Your creation and your resurrection are not but as of a single soul. Indeed Allah is all-hearing, all-seeing.***

Now the discussion turns to the possibility of the Resurrection, especially in that the polytheists thought it (to be) a far-fetched notion because of the number of people who had died and decayed into the earth beyond all recognition.

When God says *Your creation and your resurrection are not but as of a single soul*, He intends to show that the resurrection is not only possible but also easily achieved, as God is not distracted from one thing by another, nor is He impeded by multiplicity; one and many are the same to Him. Furthermore, He mentions creation along with resurrection to show that there is no difference between originating something and bringing it back again—both are equally easy or difficult. In fact, actions cannot even be described as easy or difficult for Him in the first place.

By using the second-person plural "your" (*-kum*) in *your creation and*

your resurrection (khalqukum wa… baʿathukum) to refer to mankind, and then equating this with a single soul, it is as if to say: "O human beings! Despite your multitude, your creation and resurrection are the same to God as the creation and resurrection of a single soul. If it seems hard to imagine that God could resurrect all humanity to hold them to account for their deeds because of the sheer number of human beings, then this can only be because you think He is unaware of your many different actions. However, God is not ignorant of any part of them because He is all-hearing of your speech and all-seeing of your deeds. In other words, He is directly aware of your behaviour.

The above repels the objection to the phrasing of the verse, that since the coda is supposed to provide the rationale (*taʿlīl*) for what has come before it, it would have been more appropriate to invoke God's power. For example, by saying: "Indeed God has power over all things" or "Indeed God is all-powerful, all-mighty" or something along those lines, rather than "all-hearing, all-seeing", as these attributes have nothing to do with creation and resurrection!

The reason *all-hearing, all-seeing* have been chosen in this context is because the verse is responding to the objection that the resurrection is for recompensing humanity for their deeds, but these deeds are many and intertwined with one another. Therefore, how can God separate them out in order to requite people for them? In other words, the original objection is aimed at what was said four verses before: *and We will inform them about what they have done* (31:23), and this verse answers by asking how any words or deeds can be concealed from Him while He is all-hearing, all-seeing, and nothing escapes his notice.

One might object that the coda of the verse …*and We will inform them about what they have done*… reads: *indeed Allah knows best what is in the breasts* and that this suggests that people are recompensed on the Day of Judgement for the contents of their hearts, whether good or evil. This is also indicated by the verse: *and whether you disclose what is in your hearts or hide it, Allah will bring you to account for it* (2:284).

The answer is, if we are talking about the contents of people's hearts, then *indeed Allah knows best what is in the breasts* is the response. On the other hand, if we are talking about people's external acts—their words and deeds—then the response is that *indeed Allah is all-hearing and all-seeing*. The objection and the response are, in some respects, similar to what God

says in the verse: *He said, Their knowledge is with my Lord, in a Book. My Lord neither makes any error nor forgets.* (20:52). So ponder!

The are other responses to this objection which are less complete, and these can be found in the lengthier works of commentary.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ يَجْرِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

(31:29) ***Have you not regarded that Allah makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night; and He has disposed the sun and the moon, each moving for a specified term, and that Allah is well aware of what you do?***

This verse testifies to the claim previous verse, that God has complete knowledge of human actions, with the fact that the natural order of the night and the day, where one sometimes grows longer and the other recedes according to different seasons and regions, is a fixed cycle. The same applies to the order of the sun and the moon, as their times of rising and setting change, as do their courses across the sky. Each moves for a specified duration, and there is no inconsistency in this finely-tuned system that they follow. All of this means that the one who governs this system cannot possibly be lacking in knowledge or awareness.

Makes the night pass into day means that God extends the night into the hours of the day before reversing the process and extending the day into the hours of the night. By disposing the sun and the moon to move for a specified term, God means that each of their positions is assigned a particular time in a cycle, which they return to the beginning of. Whoever witnesses this carefully arranged natural order and studies it in detail cannot possibly deny that whatever governs this system does so on the basis of knowledge, without any ignorance, as this cannot possibly be mere chance or coincidence.

And that Allah is well aware of what you do—this is joined to the position of *…that Allah makes the night pass into day…*, and the argument implicit in this is that: "Can you not see that God is well aware of what you do? After all, anyone who witnesses the order of night and day, of the sun and the moon, can hardly be unaware that the Maker is fully aware

of all acts, great and small." This is what some commentators have said.

However, this argument is problematic, because to derive God's knowledge of human actions from His knowledge of the cosmic order is purely speculative, and one cannot ask someone *have you not regarded…?* about it, as this implies a visible fact.

Perhaps what is meant by "regarding" (*have you not regarded…?*) God's awareness of human actions is that when the human being ponders on the natural order than underpins the actions of his own soul, insofar as these emanate from within the human realm, he sees that they are divided into those actions that stem from his outward abilities, such as the senses, and those which stem from his inner ones, such as comprehension or will; and from another angle, some of them divide into abilities and tools; or all of them from another angle into powers of attraction and repulsion; or from yet another angle into the stages of his life, such as childhood, adolescence, youth and old age, and so on. Then, these powers are connected to one another and make use of one another, and the soul is guided to utilise each in its proper manner in order to achieve its utmost perfection and happiness in the vicissitudes of material life, where some succeed and others fail.

When the human being studies this perplexing system, he cannot doubt that it has been set in motion by its Lord and put in order by its Maker, who is all-knowing and all-powerful. Therefore, bearing witness to this wondrous system means bearing witness to the fact that God is fully aware of what people do.

And God knows best!

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٣٠﴾

(31:30) ***That is because Allah, He is the Real, and whatever they invoke besides Him is nullity, and because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great.***

Previously, God has said that everything originates with Him, and thus depends upon Him for its continued existence and direction of its affairs, and will ultimately return to Him, without there being any difference between the one and the many, and that those whom people invoke besides Him have neither the powers of creation nor command.

Now, He combines all of these facts beneath a single explanation, namely: *That is because Allah, He is the Real, and whatever they invoke besides Him is nullity.…*

This is because *the Real* (al-Ḥaqq) is that which is subsistent and abiding, while *nullity* (al-Bāṭil) is that which is evanescent and fleeting. *Because Allah, He is the Real* (bi anna allāh huwa al-ḥaqq) contains a separating pronoun (*ḍamīr al-faṣl—Allah, He is the real*) and a predicate (*khabar*) made definite with *al-* (*al-ḥaqq*). This indicates exclusivity (*ḥaṣr*), namely that the predicate can only apply to the subject mentioned here and no other.

Therefore, when God says *that is because Allah, He is the Real*, this means that He alone enjoys subsistence without nullity. In other words, He is subsistent (*thābit*) from every aspect or, you might say, He is existent (*mawjūd*) in every possible scenario; His existence is absolute, unrestricted, and unconditioned. His existence is necessary and His non-existence is impossible. All other beings are contingent and only exist in one possible scenario, and that possible scenario is through the existence of their cause. This means that their existence is limited, in that it depends on another, and not necessary in and of itself.

And if being "real" means that something is subsistent, then God is the self-subsistent being and all other beings only subsist and become real through Him.

Reflecting on this idea, you will realise: firstly, that things in their entirety depend on God for their existence, as does the natural order as a whole and the lesser orders within each species and each individual creature.

Secondly, that entelechies (*kamālāt wujūdiyyah*), which are those attributes of existence (*ṣifāt al-wujūd*) such as knowledge, power, life, seeing, hearing, unity, creation, sovereignty, sufficiency, praise, and awareness—some of which have been enumerated in the prior verses—are attributes that subsist with God as befits His greatness and sanctity precisely because they are attributes of existence, and existence subsists with God. So such qualities are either identical with His essence (*dhāt*), as are knowledge and power, or they are extraneous to His essence but applied to His actions, such as creation, sustenance, and mercy.

Thirdly, that accepting the existence of a partner in His essence or His governance, and anything that implies deficiency or want is negated

from him. These are the negative attributes (*ṣifāt salbiyyah*) such as having no partner, having no number, or having no physicality or accidents of physicality such as time or place, ignorance, incapacity, nullity or evanescence, etc.

Therefore, God's absolute and unrestricted existence negates every kind of negative attribute from Him. In other words, it affirms His absolute existence, as a double-negation is an affirmation.

Perhaps the words, *and because Allah is the All-exalted, the All-great* imply the subsistence of both positive and negative attributes. *The All-exalted* (al-ʿalī) signifies His transcendence above any attribute that does not befit Him, and thus is the summation of the negative attributes, while *the All-great* signifies that He encompasses every kind of existent perfection, and thus is the summation of the positive attributes.

It also shows that the verse's opening is proof for its coda and its coda is proof that God encompasses all the affirmative and negative attributes. In other words, this essence is the locus of all perfections. In other words, it is God.

…and whatever they invoke besides Him is nullity… follows the same logic as *That is because Allah, He is the Real*. The deities they call upon beside Him have no reality of their own and have no power to create or direct, because "a partner to God in His divinity and lordship" is utter nullity. And if it is nullity, then in no circumstances can it be attributed with the acts of creation and governance.

"The Real" (*al-ḥaqq*), "the All-exalted" (*al-ʿalī*) and "the All-great" (*al-kabīr*) are three of God's beautiful names (*asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*). Based on the above, we have seen that "the Real" corresponds to the concept of "the Necessary Existent" (*wājib al-wujūd*), "the All-exalted" corresponds to the negative attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-salbiyyah*), and "the All-great" corresponds to the affirmative attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-thubūtiyyah*). This approximates what we have said already, namely that together these represent "the locus of all perfection" (*al-mustajmiʿ li-ṣifāt al-kamāl*).

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الْفُلْكَ تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِنِعْمَتِ اللَّهِ لِيُرِيَكُمْ مِنْ آيَاتِهِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(31:31) ***Have you not regarded that the ships sail at sea by Allah's blessing*** **(bi niʿmat Allāh),** ***that He may show you some of His***

signs? There are indeed signs in that for every patient and grateful one.

The *bāʾ* in *bi niʿmat allāh* signifies causation (*sababiyyah*), and "blessing" (*niʿmah*) is mentioned in preparation for the end of the verse, and it hints to the audience that they should give thanks to God for His blessings as it is a rational duty to give thanks to one who has brought benefit to you.

In this case, the meaning of the verse is: "Do you not see that the ships sail and travel across the sea because of God's blessings, which are the means which enable them to travel, such as the wind and the water, and other elements?"

Some commentators have suggested that the *bāʾ* here either makes its verb transitive (*taʿdiyyah*) or signifies accompaniment (*maʿiyyah*), in which case *bi-niʿmat allāh* refers to the goods being carried by the ships (that is, "with God's blessing").

The verse concludes with the coda: *There are indeed signs in that for every patient* [ṣabbār] *and grateful (*shakūr*) one—Ṣabbār* means one who is abundantly patient in times of hardship, and *shakūr* means one who gives abundant thanks in times of ease. According to some, this is an allusion to the believers.

وَإِذَا غَشِيَهُمْ مَوْجٌ كَالظُّلَلِ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى
الْبَرِّ فَمِنْهُمْ مُقْتَصِدٌ ۚ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَّا كُلُّ خَتَّارٍ كَفُورٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

(31:32) ***When waves cover them like awnings* (ẓulal)*, they invoke Allah, putting exclusive faith in Him. But when He delivers them towards land, some of them remain unswerving. And no one will impugn Our signs except an ungrateful traitor.***

Al-Rāghib says that *ẓullah* (pl. *ẓulal*) means a raincloud that overshadows someone, and it is usually used in an ominous or foreboding sense, as God says: *as if it were a canopy (*ka-annahu ẓullah*)* (7:171) and *the punishment of the day of the overshadowing cloud (*adhāb yawm al-ẓulla*)* (26:189).

So the verse means: "When the waves of the ocean cover them and surround them like a cloud, they cleave to God and pray to Him for salvation, putting their faith in Him alone." In other words, this is evidence that it is in their nature (*fiṭrah*) is to believe in divine unity.

But when He delivers them towards land, some of them (minhum)

remain unswerving: "Unswerving" (*muqtaṣid*) means one who is heading straight for a destination (*qaṣd*), and this is the divine unity to which their human nature guides them. Using *min* in *minhum* ("some of them…") is to imply a small number of them. In other words: When God saves those praying to Him with dedication and delivers them to land, only a few of them remain unswerving in their faith.

And no one will impugn Our signs except an ungrateful traitor* (khattār kafūr)*: *Khattār* is a noun of intensification (*mubālaghah*), derived from *khatr*, which means to be perfidious and disloyal. The tone of the verse suggests that this refers to many people, and the meaning is clear.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ وَاخْشَوْا يَوْمًا لَا يَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَنْ وَلَدِهِ وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَنْ وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا ۚ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ ۖ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْغَرُورُ ﴿٣٣﴾

(31:33) ***O mankind! Be wary of your Lord and fear the day when a father shall not repay his child, nor the child shall repay its father in any wise. Indeed Allah's promise is true. So do not let the life of the world deceive* (lā tagurrannakum al-ḥayāt al-dunyā)** ***you, nor let the Deceiver deceive you concerning Allah.***

After presenting ample proofs and admonitions, God draws them together in a conclusion (*O mankind! Be wary of your Lord…*) that addresses all people in general, inviting them to be wary of God and warning them of the Day of Resurrection, a day on which nothing but faith and Godwariness will avail.

Al-Rāghib says:

> "To repay (*jazāʾ*)" means "to suffice (*ghinā*)."

He also says:

> "To deceive someone" (*gharartu fulānan*) means to have seized his prize (*ghurrah*) and obtained what I want. *Ghirrah* means to be inattentive while awake, and *ghirār* means to be heedless while napping… *Gharūr* is anything that beguiles a person, whether wealth, status, desire, or Satan. Commentators have said that *the Deceiver* in this verse is either Satan, as he is the foulest deceiver, or this world, as it is said: "This world beguiles, strikes, and moves on… (*al-dunyā taghurr wa taḍurr wa tamurr*)".

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: *O mankind! Be wary of your Lord*—who is God—*and fear the day when a father shall not repay*—that is, suffice—*his child, nor the child shall repay*—that is, avail—*its father in any wise. Indeed Allah's promise*—of the Resurrection—*is true. So do not let the life of the world deceive you*—with its beguiling trinkets—*nor let the Deceiver*—referring here to the category (*jins*) of whatever deceives the human being in the life of this world, *or* referring specifically to Satan—*deceive you concerning Allah.*

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ ۖ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا ۖ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

(31:34) ***Indeed the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware.***

The meaning of the verse is clear.

Notice that God has listed three things that He has knowledge of: the knowledge of the Hour, which He keeps to Himself alone, as indicated by the verse *Indeed the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah*; the sending down of the rain; and the knowledge of what is in the wombs, which are known to others as well.

Then he mentions two things that the human being is ignorant of, and in being ignorant of this is ignorant of everything that will befall him: *No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die.*

God mentions all of this to show that He has knowledge of every affair great and small, even the Hour whose knowledge no creature can obtain. Human beings are ignorant of even the most important things that do concern them, while God knows them. Therefore, God warns them to beware of associating partners with Him, rebelling against His command or turning away from His summons, lest they perish by their own ignorance.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Kamāl al-Dīn*, Ḥammād ibn Abī Ziyād narrates:

I asked my master, Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar about the verse: *He has showered upon you His blessings, the apparent and the hidden*. (31:20) He told me, "The apparent blessing is the manifest Imām (*al-imām al-ẓāhir*), while the hidden blessing is the hidden Imām (*al-imām al-ghāʾib*)."

Author's comments: This interpretation is a case of applying the verse to an external referent (*al-jarī*).

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Jābir narrates that a man said in the presence of Imām al-Bāqir: *He has showered upon you His blessings, the apparent and the hidden* (31:20). Imām al-Bāqir said:
As for the apparent blessing, it is the Prophet and the knowledge of God and divine unity that he brought. As for the hidden blessing, it is allegiance (*wilāyah*) to us, the Prophet's Household and holding fast to our affection….

Author's comments: This is of the same kind as the previous verse.

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, about the verse *He has showered upon you…*, it is narrated by al-Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn ʿAbbās:
I asked the Prophet about it and he said, "O Ibn ʿAbbās! As for what is apparent, this is Islam, what God made of your creation, and the sustenance which He bestowed upon you. As for what is hidden, it is your wicked deeds that He conceals and does not disgrace you with.
"O Ibn ʿAbbās! Indeed God says: 'I have given the believer three things that were not his: the prayers of the faithful upon him after his deeds are done; I have made a third of his wealth to expiate his slips; and the third is that I have concealed his wicked deeds and not disgraced him with them, and were I to make them visible upon him, his own family would cast him out, never mind others!'"

Author's comments: Something similar has been narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* via Ibn ʿAbbās. Like the previous two traditions, this too is a case of applying the verse to an external referent.

(4) In *al-Tawḥīd*, ʿUmar ibn Udhaynah narrates from Imām al-Bāqir: God's Messenger said: "Every child is born upon *fiṭrah*," meaning with the knowledge that God is his creator. That is God's saying:

If you ask them, Who created the heavens and the earth? they will surely say, Allah. (31:52)

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse: *Have you not regarded that the ships sail at sea by Allah's blessing…* (31:31), we read that it means:
The ships that sail at sea by God's power.

(6) In the same source, about *There are indeed signs in that for every patient and grateful one* (31:31), we read:
He who is steadfast in poverty and deprivation and gives thanks to God in all circumstances.

(7) About the same verse, *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* presents the tradition:
Faith (*īmān*) has two halves; one half is patience and the other is thanksgiving.

Author's comments: The meaning of the tradition is taken from this verse which, as we mentioned above, is alluding to the believer.

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *except an ungrateful traitor* (31:32), we read:
A traitor (*khattār*) is a backstabber.
And about the verse *Indeed Allah's promise is true* (31:33), we read:
That is the Day of Resurrection.

(9) In his *Irshād*, Mufīd narrates the words of Imām ᶜAlī to a man whom he heard reviling this world without knowing what he should say:
This world is an abode of truth for the one who speaks truly of it, an abode of safety for one who understands it, an abode of wealth for one who takes provision from it, the place in which God's prophets prostrated and the place to which His revelation was sent down, the place of prayer for His angels and the market-place of His friends whose earnings therein are mercy and whose profit is paradise. So who can revile it when it has proclaimed its departure, announced its leave, and given news of its own demise? Through its pleasures, it created eagerness for pleasure. Through its trials, it warned of trials. It terrified and forewarned,

encouraged and alarmed!

Therefore, O you who revile the world and are beguiled by its deception! When did it deceive you? Was it by your fathers' resting in decay or your mothers' resting beneath the dirt? How many did your look after in illness with your bare hands, hoping for a cure? You consulted physicians for them, sought out medicine for them, but your seeking did not avail them and your intervention did not help them! With them, this world showed you your own death and resting place, such that neither your laments nor your loved ones could avail you!

(10) In *al-Khiṣāl* Abū Usāmah narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq:

Shall I not inform you of five things that God has not informed any of His creatures about? *Indeed the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware* (31:34).

Author's comments: There are a great many narrations from the Prophet and Imāms that foretell events in their lives, and their times and places of death. These narrations must limit the scope of the above narration and others like it to exclude cases of divine education (*taʿlīm ilāhī*). However, there are some narrations which do not allow themselves to be qualified thus and they should be given no heed.

(11) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mundhir narrates from ʿIkrimah:

A man called al-Wirāth, from the tribe of Banū Māzin ibn Ḥafṣah ibn Qays Ghaylān, came to the Prophet and said: "O Muḥammad, when will the Hour set in? Our land has grown arid; when will it be verdant? I have left behind my wife pregnant; when will she give birth? I know what I have earned today, but what will I earn tomorrow? And I know in which land I was born, but in which will I die?" Then this verse was revealed.

Author's comments: This tradition is not without issues, as the questions it contains do not correlate perfectly with the contents of the verse.

(12) In the same source, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Imām ʿAlī:

Only five things from the secrets of the Unseen were hidden from

your Prophet: *Indeed the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware* (31:34).

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End of Chapter 31

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Chapter 32

Sūrah al-Sajdah

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Verses 1-14

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah is focused on expounding the origin and the return (*al-mabdaʾ wa al-maʿād*) and establishing proofs for both. It also seeks to expel anxiety about this from people's hearts by referring to prophethood and the Book, and explaining what distinguishes those who believe in God's signs from the sinners who have forsaken the garment of servanthood. God promises unimaginable rewards to the first group and warns the later of a severe and everlasting retribution. He says they will taste the nearer punishment before the greater one. The sūrah concludes by emphasising this warning and bidding the Prophet to wait as the sinful are waiting.

The sūrah is entirely Meccan in provenance, save for verses 18 to 20, which some say are Medinan.

The section we are presently to discuss deals with the first of the two main topics outlined above.

Commentary

الٓمٓ ١ تَنزِيلُ ٱلۡكِتَٰبِ لَا رَيۡبَ فِيهِ مِن رَّبِّ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ ٢

(32:1-2) ***Alif, Lām, Mīm. The sending down of the Book, there is no doubt in it, from the Lord of all the worlds.***

Meaning: "This is the sending down of the Book." "Sending down" (*tanzīl*) is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) which carries the meaning of the passive participle (*ism mafʿūl*) and its attachment to "the Book" in a possessive construct (*iḍāfah*) yields an adjectival meaning. In other words: "This is the Book sent down, there is no doubt in it…."

From the Lord of all the worlds: This is a skilful introduction, in line

with the overall goals of the sūrah, in that it expresses both the doctrines of monotheism and resurrection that the idolaters reject, as we have seen already that they do not believe there is any Lord for all the worlds, rather that each world has its own deity and that God is the deity of these deities.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۚ بَلْ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِتُنْذِرَ قَوْمًا مَا أَتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(32:3) ***Or do they say: He has fabricated it? Rather it is the truth from your Lord, that you may warn a people to whom there did not come any warner before you, so that they may be guided.***

"Or (*am*)" here is disjunctive. The verse means: "Rather they say He has fabricated the Qur'an and falsely attributed it to God." God answers this, saying: *Rather it is the truth from your Lord, that you may warn….*

That you may warn a people to whom there did not come any warner before you: Some commentators say that this refers to the Quraysh, as no prophet had come to them before him unlike other Arab tribes who had received prophets such as Khālid ibn Sinān al-ʿAbasī and Ḥanẓalah, according to some narrations.

Other commentators say that this refers to the gap between the times of Jesus and Muḥammad, who lived as if they were unaware of their duties towards God and the purpose of worship, for which He had created them. However, the meaning of this gap is that there were no prophets sent with a new code or scripture, not that there were absolutely no prophets at all for almost six centuries—this is something we cannot accept!

So that they may be guided: This is the desired outcome (*ghāyah rajāʾiyyah*) of sending the Messenger. As we have mentioned when commenting on similar verses, this hope (*tarajjī*) either inheres in the situation or in those being addressed, not the speaker (God).

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۖ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا شَفِيعٍ ۚ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(32:4) ***It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days; then He settled on the Throne. You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor. Will you not then take admonition?***

We have already discussed similar verses, such as *He, who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days, and then settled on the Throne* (25:59). It has also already been explained that "settling upon the Throne" (*istawāʾ ʿalā al-ʿarsh*) is a visual allusion to the position of directing existent things through a general, all-encompassing natural order that rules overall. This is why we see that the Divine Throne usually appears in contexts related to governance of the cosmos, such as:

…then settled on the Throne. He draws the night's cover over the day… (7:54)

…and then settled on the Throne, directing the command … (10:3)

…then settled on the Throne. He knows whatever enters the earth and whatever emerges from it… (57:4)

…Lord of the Throne, the All-glorious, doer of what He desires… (85:16).

The reason why God mentions settling on the Throne after the creation of the heavens and the earth is because the target of the discussion is God's exclusive lordship and divinity. But merely ascribing the creative act to Him does nothing to refute the beliefs of the idolaters; they do not deny that He is the sole creator, they merely say that the governance of the cosmos (which is lordship) belongs to their deities. In doing so, they reserve divinity (*ulūhiyyah*—meaning to make something an object of worship, or *maʿbūdiyyah*) to their own deities and say that God is the lord of lords and the head of the gods.

Therefore, to provide an argument to refute their belief, God mentions creation and then governance together, because each one of these entails the other and the two cannot be separated; the originator of things and their creator must also be their lord and the one who directs their affairs. In other words, He alone will be a lord and He alone will be a god, just as He alone is a creator.

This is the reason why God mentions creation and governance together in the verse were are discussing: *It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days; then He settled on the Throne. You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor.* And guardianship and intercession, like settling upon the Throne, are both matters of governance rather than creation.

You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor—a guardian (*walī*) is the one who directs a thing's affairs, and it is obvious that the affairs upon which our lives depend rest on a universal order that governs

all things and the specific order that pertains to us. This order, whatever it is, is a necessary corollary of the qualities of the creation of things. The creative act, however it came about, originated with God. Therefore it is God who is our guardian who looks after the our affairs, just as He alone is the guardian of all things without partner.

An intercessor (*shafīʿ*), based on what we have already said in our discussion of *shafāʿah* in the first volume of this work, is something that attaches to a deficient cause (*sabab nāqiṣ*) and, in doing so, renders it complete and effective. Intercession means to render a deficient cause sufficient, so that it has its effect. If we apply this to the chains of cause and effect in the cosmos, we see that these causes are composed of many different elements, and these elements intercede for one another in order to bring about their effect. For example, by this understanding, the clouds, rain, sun, and shade are all intercessors for plants.

Now, if the origin of these causes, their elements, and the connections between them is God, then He is the true intercessor who completes their deficiencies, and there is no genuine intercessor besides Him.

To put it in more precise terms, we have already seen in our discussion of the Beautiful Names in the eighth volume[1] that God's Beautiful Names are intermediaries between Him and His creation in carrying the divine effusion (*fayḍ*) to them. So, for instance, God provides them with sustenance insofar as He is an all-generous, all-merciful, and all-sufficient sustainer (*rāziq jawād ghanī raḥīm*); He heals the sick insofar as He is the all-kind, all-clement, most-merciful healer (*shāfin, muʿāfin, raʾūf, raḥīm*); and He destroys the oppressors insofar as He is severe in violence and mighty in vengeance (*shadīd al-baṭsh dhū intiqām ʿazīz*), and so on and so forth. Therefore, there is no complex being in existence except that its existence has come about through the mediation of several of these Beautiful Names, one above another and one beside another. Whatever is more specific mediates between the thing itself and that which is more general, just as the name "the Healer" (*al-shāfī*) mediates between the sick person and between "the All-kind" (*al-raʾūf*) and "the Most-merciful" (*al-raḥīm*), and "the All-merciful" mediates between it and "the All-powerful" (*al-qadīr*).

In reality, this process of mediation outlined above represents the realization of a cause's effectiveness. Or, you might say it brings a thing

1 This corresponds to the sixteenth English volume. (Pub.)

closer to the cause to actualize its effect. Therefore, from this you might say that God is the intercessor to some of His names via others of His names! In short, He is the ultimate intercessor and, in reality, there is no intercessor except Him. So understand this.

From the above, it is clear that there is no problem in calling Him an intercessor in the sense that He intercedes with Himself to Himself, meaning that one of His attributes intercedes with another one of His attributes on behalf of something else. This is just as people seek refuge from His wrath with His mercy, and from His justice to His grace. As for God interceding on behalf of something with someone other than Himself, this is utterly impossible!

And because some consider it problematic to call God an intercessor in this latter sense, namely in the sense of Him interceding with someone other than Himself, they have offered several different interpretations of this verse.

Some have said *besides Him* (dūnahu) in the phrase *You do not have besides Him any guardian or intercessor* actually means "with Him" and is also a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for the pronoun *you* (-kum). This renders the meaning of the verse: "So long as you disregard Him, you have no guardian or intercessor with Him." In other words, this negates the existence of any guardian or intercessor for them with God.

The problem with this reading is that even if *dūn* can be understood in the sense of "with", the presence of *min* ("any") indicates that *dūn* here carries the meaning of "other than." There is also no sense in inserting the meaning of "disregarding" or changing the meaning of *You do not have besides Him…* to "you do not have with Him…."

Others have said that the meaning of *intercessor* (shafīʿ) in this verse is actually "helper" (*nāṣir*) and the phrase *besides Him* is a circumstantial qualifier for *guardian* (walī), which renders the meaning: "You have no guardian or helper besides Him." The problem with this reading is that it needlessly adopts a metaphorical meaning for *intercessor*.

Others have said that the use of the term *intercessor* here is only for the sake of argument, as the idolaters whom the Qur'an is warning would often say that their gods were their intercessors and claim that each of them would intercede for them with God. This makes the meaning of the verse: "If a god is a guardian and an intercessor, then there is no guardian or intercessor except God."

Others have said: *Besides* (dūn) means "with" (*ʿind*) and the pronoun "him" (*-hu*) in *besides Him* (dūnahu) actually refers to divine punishment. This renders the meaning: "You have no one close at hand who can save you from His punishment or any intercessor who can speak on your behalf." However, the problem here is that the reading arbitrarily claims that the pronoun refers to God's punishment without any evidence for this fact.

All of these readings of the verse are problematic because they resort to semantic and intellectual gymnastics in order to avoid understanding "intercessor" (*shafīʿ*) in the sense of one who grants intercession, while you will recall that this is its proper meaning.

Will you not then take admonition? This is a rhetorical question meant to rebuke them for continuing to turn away from all the rational evidence that the governance and direction of the cosmos is in God's hands and that, therefore, He is the only true object of worship and that, aside from Him, they have no guardian or intercessor as they claim their gods to be.

يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ ۝٥

(32:5) ***He directs the affair*** **(amr)** ***from the heavens to the earth; then it ascends toward Him in a day whose span is a thousand years by your reckoning.***

This verse adds to what has already been explained by saying that the direction of the affairs of all beings rests with Him, which indicates that the Arabic word *amr* must be read as "affair" (*shaʾn*) rather than "command" (that is, the opposite of prohibition or *nahī*).

To direct a thing (*tadbīr*) means to place one thing behind (*fī dābir*) another, and to bring one affair after another. Therefore, this goes back to the coming into being of existent phenomena one after another, like a chain that extends between the heavens and the earth. Elsewhere, God says: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21). And He also says: *Indeed We have created everything in a measure.* (54:49)

Saying *…then it ascends toward Him…* after *He directs the affair from the heavens to the earth…* suggests that *tadbīr* conveys a sense of descent (*tanzīl*), meaning: "He directs the affair to descend" or "He causes it to

descend, stage by stage" from the heaven to the earth. Perhaps the affair (*amr*) to which this verse refers is the same as the one mentioned in the verse: *Then He set them up as seven heavens in two days, and revealed in each heaven its affair* (41:12).

…then it ascends toward Him… implies that the meaning of *heavens* (*samāʾ*) in this verse is the station of divine proximity to which all crucial matters return, rather than *heavens* in the sense of the sky or a locale in the physical realm. After all, *the affair* is first described as descending and then ascending, and the apparent meaning of this is that it ascends by the same route as it first descended. And while, so far, the heavens and the earth have been mentioned, as well as ascent and descent, the fact that the descent takes place *from* the heavens and the ascent is *to* God indicates that *the heavens* here is the station of divine proximity and presence from which emanates the direction of all affairs. Or, it could indicate that the heavens are the centre from which the affairs of the earth are directed and God, who encompasses all things, sends down His directions from there. Perhaps the latter reading is easier to understand in light of the aforementioned verse *and revealed in each heaven its affair* (41:12).

In a day whose span is a thousand years by your reckoning—Meaning that, in any case, this takes place in a period of time that, were it to be measured in terms of earthly time and motion, would stretch for a thousand years, as it is obvious that our system for measuring time in days, nights, months, and years only applies on the earth.

And insofar as the heavens are a realm of divine proximity and presence which transcends the bounds of time, the verse means that it is a period that, were it to be understood in terms of earthly events, would stretch for a thousand of the years that humans count.

But does this refer to the duration of the affair's ascent, descent, and stay on earth combined; merely the duration of its ascent and descent combined but not its stay; the duration of its ascent and descent separately; or only the duration of its ascent? Based on the fact that *in a day* only qualifies *it ascends toward Him*, this would suggest that this only refers to its ascent, as is also implied by the verse: *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day whose span is fifty thousand years* (70:4).

Then further questions arise: Assuming that this is the duration of the ascent, does this ascent refer to the ascent of all phenomena towards God or the ascent of the Day of Resurrection (meaning its duration)?

And is it fifty thousand years in relation to a disbeliever because of the difficulty involved, or is a thousand years merely the duration of a single stage of the Day of Resurrection, which then consists of fifty stages, and each stage lasts a thousand years?

Then we might ask whether the phrase *whose span is a thousand years* is supposed to provide a precise figure, or is it simply meant to indicate a long duration, as in the verse *Each of them is eager to live a thousand years* (2:96), which merely means he desires to live a very long life, although this meaning does not fit with the tone of the verse under discussion?

As you can see, the present verse entertains many possible readings. However, the most reasonable would be that *in a day* only qualifies *it ascends toward Him* and that this in turn refers to just one stage of the fifty stages of the Day of Resurrection. And God knows best!

ذَٰلِكَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٦﴾

(32:6) ***That is the Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, the All-mighty, the All-merciful.***

The vocabulary of this verse has already been explained and the relevance of the three Divine Names mentioned in the context is clear.

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ۖ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنسَانِ مِن طِينٍ ﴿٧﴾

(32:7) ***Who perfected* (aḥsana)** ***everything that He created, and commenced man's creation from clay.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Ḥasan* (lit. "good" but with specific meanings in different contexts) refers to anything that is pleasant and desirable. There are three kinds of good: that which reason deems good, that which desire deems good, and that which the senses deem good.

This defines good in relation to its qualities and categorises it according to the different ways in which human beings apprehend it.

In essence, to be *ḥasan* means that the different parts of a thing are in harmony with one another and that the sum of them are suitable for some external purpose or goal. Therefore, a face is *ḥasan* ("handsome") when its various parts—the eyes, eyebrows, nose, mouth, etc.—are in harmony with one another. Equally, justice is *ḥasan* ("good") because

it is conducive to goal of civic harmony, which means that each person receives their rightful due.

When we ponder on how things have been created, we see that each one's parts are in harmony with one another, and that each one as a whole is fully-equipped with whatever is conducive to its perfection and felicity, in such a way that there is no way it could be better equipped for its purpose. Therefore, from this we conclude that all things are good in themselves and to the extent that they are in the best possible form.

As for any evil or badness that we perceive in things, this is down to one of two causes. First, the thing we perceive to be bad might derive its badness from privation (*dhā ʿunwān ʿadamī*), meaning from the absence of something, that is, something that does not exist. For instance, when we look at injustice (*ẓulm*), we see that it is not an act itself that is evil, but rather the act insofar as that act deprives another person of their right; equally, when we look at fornication (*zinā*), we see that the act is not something evil in itself, as the act is the same for fornication or wedlock (*nikāḥ*), but rather that it is evil insofar as it contravenes the divine law and is harmful to society.

Second, the thing we might perceive to be bad might only be bad relative to another thing. For example, the colocynth relative to the watermelon, the thistle relative to the rose, or the scorpion relative to the human being. These things are only considered evil in relation to their opposites and in relation to our natural disposition as human beings. In reality, this second source for the appearance of evil devolves to the first one we outlined.

In any case, nothing that exists is considered evil insofar as it exists and is a created entity. This is indicated by the verse: *who perfected everything that He created* when we place it beside the verse: *Allah is creator of all things* (39:62). From these two verses we deduce: firstly, that creation (*khulqah*) entails perfection (*ḥusn*) and that every created thing is good insofar as it is a created thing; secondly, that all evil and badness is not something created insofar as it is evil or bad, such as sins and evil deeds insofar as all things are only evil relative to one another, and not in an absolute sense.

…and commenced man's creation from clay—here *man* refers to the species as a whole; their creation was commenced from clay because all of the individual members of the species are descended from those who

were created out of clay rather than by means of sexual reproduction, namely Adam and Eve The evidence for this reading is the following verse, which reads: *Then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid—progeny* (nasl) means offspring produced by two parents through sexual reproduction. The juxtaposition of the two ideas of man being created from clay and by procreation would not work if both referred to the same phenomenon; namely that the human created from clay was also created from base fluid. And were God to intend this meaning, it would have been more fitting to say: "Then He made *him* from the extract of a base fluid."

ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ مَهِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

(32:8) ***Then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid.***

According to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, an "extract" (*sulālah*) is the quintessence of a thing that is extracted from it. A man's semen is called an "extract" because it is extracted from his loins. "Base" (*mahīn*) means lowly and weak. The particle then (*thumma*) at the beginning of the verse signifies a gap of time.

The meaning of the verse is: Then We caused him to be born through procreation using an extract of lowly or weak fluid.

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ ۖ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

(32:9) ***Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit, and made for you the hearing, the sight, and the hearts. Little do you thank.***

"To proportion" (*taswiyah*) means to shape something or to complete a task. *And breathed into him of His Spirit* is a metaphor which compares God's spirit (*rūḥ*) to the breath that He inhales before exhaling into a receptacle other than Himself. It is described as *His spirit* (with the possessive construct) to magnify the station of the spirit (as opposed to saying that this spirit was a part of God).

The meaning of the verse is: Then He shaped the human being whose creation had begun from clay and who was made to procreate via an extract of a base fluid, and He blew into him from the noble spirit that belonged to Him.

…and made for you the hearing, the sight, and the hearts—This enumerates the blessings that God granted to the human being in the form of sense perception and cognitive faculties; hearing and sight belong to the senses, and the heart belongs to cognition and is more general than the particular faculties of the imagination or the reason.

Little do you thank—meaning you give little in the way of thanks. This sentence is an aside meant as a reproach.

Some have suggested the sentence is a circumstantial qualifier, which would render the meaning: "He made for you the hearing, the sight and the hearts even though you give little in the way of thanks." But however we read the sentence, its force is one of rebuke and complaint.

The transition in address from the third-person ("he") to the second-person plural ("you") is to make clear that God's blessings not only encompass all His creatures but that they exceed the thanks these creatures give, for none of them are able to fully thank God for His blessings but also many of them are less grateful than they could be.

وَقَالُوا أَإِذَا ضَلَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَإِنَّا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ۚ بَلْ هُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ كَافِرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(32:10) ***They say, When we have been lost in the dust, shall we be indeed created anew? Rather they disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord.***

This verse quotes an argument of those who deny the Resurrection which rests on its improbability. Some say that "to be lost in the dust" means to have dissipated, as one might say "the blessing was lost" to mean that it had gone completely. Others say that it means to have disappeared. In any case, the force of the argument is: "When we have died and our bodies have disintegrated so completely into the earth that you can no longer identify any part of them and there is not even any memory of our having existed, do you mean to say that we will be created again as we were before?"

This question is, of course, rhetorical and its force is to deny the possibility of this happening. *Created anew* refers to the Resurrection.

Rather they disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord: This strikes off from the substance of their words *When we have been lost in the dust…*, as if to say: "They do not deny the new creation because they deny Our

power to bring it about or for any other reason. It is because they deny that they will ever come back to Us." This is why the Qur'an responds to their words with evidence that they will, in fact, return to God.

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِى وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ﴿١١﴾

(32:11) ***Say, You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you. Then you will be brought back to your Lord.***

"To take something away" (*tawaffī*) means to grasp something in its entirety, such as taking one's due or taking repayment on a loan.

…the angel of death, who has been charged with you: It is said this means that he has been charged with causing you to die and taking your soul. However, the verse is unrestricted and therefore more general in meaning than this.

The present verse attributes the act of taking away (*tawaffī*) to the angel of death. However, the verse: *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42) ascribes this to God; and the verses: *When death approaches anyone of you, Our messengers take him away* (6:61) and: *Those whom the angels take away while they are wronging themselves* (16:28) ascribe this to the angels and the messengers. The reason for this is that each verse is looking at a different level of the causal chain. The immediate cause is the messenger angels who assist the angel of death, above whom is the angel of death who commands them according to God's directions. Above all of them and encompassing them entirely, of course, is God, who is the ultimate cause and the cause of all causes. An apt analogy for this is the act of writing; is it the pen, the hand, or the person that writes, or is it all three?

Then you will be brought back to your Lord: This is the return which the previous verse refers to as *the encounter* (liqāʾ) which will take place during the Resurrection which happens both as a result of the angel of death taking a person's life and sometime after it, as signified by the use of *then* (thumma).

In whatever way we approach it, this verse responds to the argument of the idolaters that their bodies will have become lost in the dust of the earth and that therefore the Resurrection cannot take place. However, it is obvious that saying the angel of death causes them to die does not address the core of their argument. Therefore, the assertion *then you will be brought back to your Lord* appears to be an empty claim without

evidence to support it. Such a style of argument hardly befits God, so how are we to explain this verse?

God commands His messenger to respond to their argument for the improbability of the Resurrection by making the counter-claim that death does not represent the end of a person. On the contrary, the angel of death who has been entrusted with you will take you fully from your bodies—meaning he will extract your souls, in the sense of severing their bonds to the body. Your souls are the true essence of your being. Therefore, whatever is "you" is preserved and kept safe—none of it will be lost on the earth. Only your bodies will be lost as they transform from one thing into another, but they were already changing from the moment they came into being. Therefore, what is truly "you" will be kept safe until you return to your Lord at the time of the Resurrection and the souls return to their bodies.

This refutes their claim that the Resurrection is rendered impossible by the scattering of their bodies, regardless of whether by this they mean that the Resurrection seems highly improbable or that the destruction of the body results in the loss of a person's individuality, in which case there will be nothing left to bring back. Contrary to this claim, the verse articulates that the reality of the human being is his soul—that thing he calls "I"—and this soul is not the body. On the contrary, the body acquires its individuality from the soul. This soul does not disintegrate upon death, nor does it cease to exist, rather it is kept safe in God's power until it is permitted to return to its Lord for final judgement and recompense, whereat it will be resurrected in the manner described by God.

The above makes clear the connection between *You will be taken away* and *When we have been lost in the dust* and shows that it is, in fact, an effective argument to the objection the speaker has raised. However, some commentators have run into problems when they sought to interpret *taken away* to mean death in general, without paying attention to the fact that God had chosen to express Himself with this vocabulary. This has forced them to engage in some rather contorted reasoning to show the connection between the two verses.

Secondly, it also shows that this verse is one of the clearest indications in the Qur'an that the soul is not identical with the body or any particular part or state of the body.

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُو رُءُوسِهِمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا

فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(32:12) ***Were you to see when the guilty hang their heads before their Lord, Our Lord! We have seen and heard. Send us back so that we may act righteously. Indeed we are convinced.***

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"To hang one's head" is to lower it. Based on the coda of this verse, *the guilty* (mujrimīn) are those who denied the Resurrection. The use of the definitive article for them suggests that it refers to a specific group, namely "those who denied the Resurrection and said: *When we have been lost in the dust….*"

There is a parallel between the expression used for the Resurrection *before their Lord* and what was said about them before, namely: *Rather they disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord* (32:10). In other words, they will stand at the encounter with their Lord in a way that they cannot deny, hence their words *we have seen and heard* and their request to be sent back to act righteously, as they now see that their salvation lies only in faith and good deeds. On the Day of Resurrection, they now have attained absolutely certainty of faith but have no good deeds to accompany it. Therefore they confess that they believe but ask to be sent back to this world to do righteous deeds in order that they might win salvation.

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So the meaning of the verse is: Were you to see those who were guilty of denying the encounter with God lowering their heads out of shame, humiliation, and regret as they stood before their Lord, saying: "Our Lord, we have seen with our own eyes and heard with obedience. So send us back that we might act righteously. We are certain now!"

In short, you see them denying the encounter with their Lord now, but were you to see them when they are overcome with shame and humiliation on the Day of Resurrection, you would see them lower their heads and accept that which they deny today and ask to be sent back to this world. But they will not be sent back.

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدَاهَا وَلَٰكِنْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ مِنِّي لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

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(32:13) ***Had We wished, We would have given every soul its guidance, but My word became due: Surely I will fill hell with the jinn and humans together.***

Meaning: Had we wished, we would have given everyone—believers and disbelievers alike—the guidance they needed. We would have done this by the disbeliever's own free choice to choose guidance just as we willed that the believer be guided by his own free choice, without any compulsion or force, as these would render moral obligations and the final recompense for one's actions pointless.

…but My word became due: Surely I will fill hell with the jinn and humans together—meaning: But there was a prior decree from Me, namely to fill hell with the jinn and humans. This decree is found in God's words to Iblīs when he refused to bow to Adam: *He said, By Your might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them. He said, The truth is that and I speak the truth: I will surely fill hell with you and all of those who follow you* (38:82–85). Therefore, He decreed that He would send the followers of Iblīs to eternal punishment.

This means that He will not guide them because of the wrongdoing and profligacy they have displayed by forsaking the garb of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyyah*), as God says: *and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot* (9:19), *and Allah does not guide the transgressing lot* (9:80), and there are many other verses in the same vein.

فَذُوقُوا بِمَا نَسِيتُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا إِنَّا نَسِينَاكُمْ ۖ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْخُلْدِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(32:14) *So taste for your having forgotten the encounter of this day of yours. We have forgotten you. Taste the everlasting punishment because of what you used to do.*

This follows logically from *but My word became due*. "To forget something (*nisyān*)" literally means for its image to vanish from memory but it is also used in the sense of paying no attention to something of importance, and this is the sense in which it is used here.

The meaning of the verse is: Because it was decreed that the followers of Iblīs should taste punishment, so taste the punishment because you paid no heed to the encounter of this day, to the extent that you stubbornly denied it and did not act righteously to earn reward on it thereby. So, on this day, We shall pay no heed to your happiness or salvation.

The phrase *Taste the everlasting punishment because of what you used to do* emphasises and clarifies the preceding phrase, with the meaning:

What they are being told to taste is the everlasting punishment, and their "having forgotten the encounter of this day" refers to their evil deeds.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Naḥḥās relates from Ibn ʿAbbās:
Sūrat al-Sajdah was revealed in Mecca, save for the three verses beginning with: *Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal* (32:18).

(2) In the same source, Saʿīd ibn Manṣūr and Ibn Abī Shaybah relate from ʿAlī:
The fixed prostrations (*ʿazāʾim*) of the Qur'an are the *alif lām mīm sajdah*, *ḥā mīm tanzīl sajdah*, al-Najm, and *read in the Name of your Lord who created*.
[That is, Sūrat al-Sajdah, 32; Sūrat Fuṣṣilāt, 41, Sūrat al-Najm, and Sūrat al-ʿAlaq, 96.]

(3) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is narrated from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
The fixed prostrations (*ʿazāʾim*) are four: *read in the Name of your Lord who created*, al-Najm, *tanzīl sajdah*, and *ḥā mīm sajdah*.
[That is, Sūrat al-ʿAlaq, 96; Sūrat al-Najm, 53; Sūrat al-Sajdah, 32; and Sūrat Fuṣṣilāt, 41.]

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad and Ṭabarānī relate from al-Sharīd ibn Suwayd:
The Prophet caught sight of a man who had let his wrapper (*izār*) hang low. He told him, "Lift up your wrapper!"
He said, "O Messenger of God! I have a deformity in my foot that causes my knees to knock together."
He replied, "Lift up your wrapper! All that God creates is beautiful (*ḥasan*)."

(5) In *al-Faqīh*, it is related:
Imām al-Ṣādiq was asked about the verses: *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death…* (39:42), *You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you* (32:11), *…those whom the angels take away while they are pure…* (16:32), *Those*

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whom the angels take away while they are wronging themselves (16:28), *Our messengers take him away* (6:61), and *Were you to see when the angels take away the faithless* (8:50). [He was asked,] "At any moment, at all the places in this world, only God knows how many people might pass away. So how can all of these verses be understood together?"
He said, "God has given the angel of death assistants amongst the angels to take people's souls. He is like the chief of police (*ṣāḥib al-shurṭah*), who has human helpers to take care of his needs. Therefore, the angels take them away *and* the angel of death takes them away from the angels with what he seizes, and God takes them from the angel of death."

(6) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Abū al-Shaykh relate from Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī:
God's Messenger went to call upon a man from the Anṣār who was unwell. When he entered, he saw the angel of death standing beside the man's head. God's Messenger said to him: "O angel of death! By kind to my companion, for he is a believer."
The angel replied: "Be glad, O Muḥammad! For indeed I am kind to every believer. And know, O Muḥammad, that I do visit frequently. So beware! God has created no family member, no city-dweller nor tent-dweller on land or on sea, except that I inspect them five times every day and night. I know everything about them, great or small, better than they know themselves. By God, O Muḥammad, I cannot take the soul of a fly until God tells me to take it!"

(7) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *Had We wished We would have given every soul its guidance* (32:13), we read:
If we had wished to make them all infallible (*maʿṣūm*), we could have.

Author's comments: Infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*) does not interfere with free will, so there is no contradiction between this narration and what we have said already in the explanation of this verse.

A Discussion on the Nature of the Primordial Human (*al-insān al-awwalī*)

We have already touched on this in our explanation of the first verses of Sūrat al-Nisāʾ,[1] and what we shall say here is a continuation of that.

As we have said before, there are verses whose apparent meaning makes it clear that all the human beings alive today originated from a single couple, namely a man and a woman. The Qur'an calls the man Adam, and they were not produced from a mother and father but were rather created from dust, clay, dried clay, or the earth, depending on the expression chosen in a particular verse.

This is what the everyday meaning of the verses tell us. However, it is not laid out in such explicit terms that it cannot be interpreted in some other way, nor has it been made an article of faith (*masʾalat min ḍarūriyyāt al-dīn*), though it could be argued that it is necessary to believe that the current generation all go back to Adam based on the Qur'an. However, does this term "Adam" refer to an *archetypal* Adam, meaning a human nature that is shared between many people (or even a small group of them) who are our progenitors, or does this refer to a single particularized human individual?

Then, based on this, did this human individual emerge from another species, such as the apes through a gradual process of evolution, moving steadily towards perfection? Or was this individual a human being with the full capacity to think born from a human being that lacked this full intellectual ability, in which case the origin of the human species (which is rational and therefore capable of receiving moral obligations) branches off from a less developed species? This would make the human beings today the totality of the human species, all of whom originated from a single complete human being who is called Adam. And this species would have evolved from another species that lacked the same rational capacities as human beings, such that we could trace this process of evolution through all related species of animals until we reach the very lowest and most basic forms of animal lives. Then, if we reversed the direction, we would move from the lowest and most basic forms of animal life to the most advanced of them, until we reached the human beings who lacked the capacity for rational thought before finally reaching the fully-fledged human being. And all of this is in a chain of relations consisting of parents and children.

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1 See English volume 8. (Pub.)

Or, is it the case that all the generations of human beings can ultimately be traced back to Adam and his wife who were made from the earth, without any parents?

It is not necessary to believe in any of these hypotheses.

In any case, the apparent meaning of the Qur'an's verses lends itself to the latter most option, namely that all human beings go back to Adam and his wife, and that Adam and his wife were made from the earth without parents.

However, the verses do not explain precisely how Adam was created from the earth, nor whether any intermediary causes participated in his creation, nor whether there was anything miraculous (*khāriqah lil-ʿāda*) about it. Was his creation accomplished directly by the divine will, without any delay? Such that the body made of clay transformed into a living breathing human being? Or did he become a fully-fledged human being over a period of time, gradually developing and taking shape until he was ready to receive God's spirit (*rūḥ*)? In the latter case, this would mean a series of natural causes and conditions similar to those we see in operation in the human will.

One of the clearest pieces of evidence we have for this is the verse: *Indeed the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was* (3:59). This verse was revealed to counter the arguments of the Christians, who said that Jesus was God's son because he was born without a human father, and there is no son without a father, therefore his father must be God. In short, the verse responds by saying that Jesus is no different than Adam, whom God created from the surface of the earth (*adīm al-arḍ*) without any mother or father. So why, the verse asks, do the Christians not say Adam was God's son?

And if *He created him from dust* means that his creation, like that of all the creatures made through procreation, ultimately comes from the earth, then the meaning of the verse is: Jesus, who has no father, is like Adam in that his creation, like everyone else's, goes back to the dust of the earth. However, in this reading there is clearly nothing significant about Adam as compared to any other person, in which case it makes no sense to single him out for comparison with Jesus. This reading destroys the meaning of the verse and renders it useless as an argument against the Christians. Therefore, it must be rejected.

This is also the apparent meaning of all the verses which indicate that Adam was made from dust, clay, or the like thereof. Verses such as: *and commenced man's creation from clay* (32:21) and *Indeed I am about to create*

a human being out of clay (38:71).

But what about the claim that "Adam" here is more archetype than individual, in the sense that it refers to a common humanity shared between many individuals? In other words, when we say that people are "children of Adam", this simply means that they are all individuals who share in this common humanity. This would mean that the story of Adam's entry into paradise and his expulsion from it as a result of Satan's temptations is symbolic of his inherent dignity and nearness to God, then his fall from grace as a result of following his own desires and obeying Iblīs.

This reading is rejected on the grounds of the previous verse and the apparent meaning of many other verses, such as *who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and, from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women* (4:1). If *a single soul* here meant the archetypal Adam, then there would be no need to give him a wife. Equally relevant are those verses which say God admitted Adam *and his wife* into paradise, and that he *and his wife* disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree.

Moreover, the idea of an archetypal Adam is predicated on the eternity of the world and the species it contains, including the human race, and that its members are infinite in number both in the past and in the future. However, the principles of science utterly reject this hypothesis.

Then there is the idea that humanity goes back to a small group of people, such as four couples of different races, or from couples that inhabited different parts of the world, such as the Old World, America, and Australia. This is rejected on the basis of all the verses of the Qur'an that point to the human race going back to Adam and his wife. In these verses, as we have already said, "Adam" can only mean either a single human individual or a common human nature shared between all individuals. The language of the verses does not support the possibility of it referring to a group of people.

Another problem with this reading is that it supposes that the different races of human beings are entirely separate species, each originating from their own primordial couple; or that the continents of the earth have been eternally separated from one another, and the falsity of these hypotheses in light of our current scientific knowledge is so clear as to be almost self-evident.

As for the claim that human beings are descended from one or more human couples that evolved from another very closely related species, such as apes, this is rejected by the fact that the previous verses speak of the first human being created from dust without parents. To this should be

added the fact that there is insufficient scientific proof for such a theory, as we shall discuss below.

There is also a theory that all human beings are descended from two fully-fledged human individuals (meaning humans with the ability to think) who evolved from a more primitive (and now extinct) species of human by the process of natural selection. This is rejected by the verse: *Indeed the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was* (3:59), based on the points we have already raised above, and other verses which carry a similar message.

Moreover, the available scientific evidence is not sufficient to support such a conclusion, as it rests on examples taken from dissection, animal foetuses, and archaeological finds that point to gradual changes in the attributes of species, their limbs and organs, and the appearance of living creatures by a gradual process, moving from a less-perfect state to a more-perfect one, meaning that simpler organisms existed before more complex ones.

However, the appearance of a species that is better equipped for survival after one that is less well equipped only shows that the matter[1] has gradually become more capable of receiving different animal forms; it became able to present a more perfect form of life after a less perfect one, and a more sophisticated one after a less sophisticated one. As for the idea that the more-developed animals descended from the less-developed ones, despite a lengthy and wide-ranging search, scientists have been unable to find a single instance of a more-developed species descended from a less-developed one as it emerges from the latter. Instead, they have only found separate individuals.

Moreover, the evidence found for gradual change is really only evidence of change within a single species, not changing from one species to another as they claim.

It is incontrovertible that living matter has different levels of development and complexity and that the highest of these levels is represented by human life, followed by the life of those organisms that most resemble it. However, the evidence does not support the conclusion that this came about by each species transforming from a lesser one. Of course, some might speculate that this is the case, but this is not certain. Therefore, the theory of evolution, upon which much of modern science rests, is still a speculation and one that might change as our understanding of science

1 Here the author uses "matter" and "form" in an Aristotelian sense. (Trans.)

continues to expand.

Perhaps one might argue for human evolution with the verse: *Indeed Allah chose Adam and Noah, and the progeny of Abraham and the progeny of Imran above all the nations* (3:33), as "to choose" means to select the very best of something and it is only possible to select something when there is a group from which one can be chosen and preferred above the others, just as Noah, the progeny of Abraham, and the progeny of ʿImrān were chosen from amongst their own peoples. However, this would mean that Adam too must have been amongst a group from which he was chosen, and this group would have been none other than the primordial humans who lacked the capacity for fully rational cognition. Therefore, God chose Adam from amongst them and equipped him with intellect, causing him to become a fully-fledged human being by virtue of his superior capacity for thought. Then his children multiplied while the previous species died out.

However, because *all the nations* (al-ʿālamīn) is prefixed with the definite article, it signifies a general meaning and, as such, applies to all human beings until the Day of Resurrection. So these prophets and their progeny have been chosen above not only their contemporaries, but those who came after them also. This is like the saying: *We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations* (21:107). So there is nothing preventing Adam being chosen above all of his descendants aside for those mentioned in the verse.

And if one were to argue that someone can only be "chosen" from amongst his contemporaries, then why can we not say that Adam was chosen above his children who were his contemporaries? After all, there is nothing in the verse to say that he was chosen by God at the moment of his creation or before he had any children!

Furthermore, if Adam was chosen over the primordial humans per the argument we cited above, and this is because he was endowed with intellect, then all the children of Adam enjoy superiority over the primordial humans by virtue of this, in which case there is no basis for singling out Adam in the verse over and above other human beings!

Another verse that might be used in this vein would be *Certainly We created you, then We formed you, then We said to the angels, Prostrate before Adam* (7:11), based on the fact that *then* (thumma) indicates a gap in time between two events. Therefore, the human species must have existed before Adam was created and the angels were told to prostrate before him.

However, the use of *then* in the verse is being used to show logical sequence rather than a temporal gap, and it is frequently used in this way

in God's speech. In addition to this, there is another meaning for the verse, which we have discussed in the relevant part of our commentary.

Yet another verse that might be invoked in support of evolution is *who perfected everything that He created, and commenced man's creation from clay. Then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid. Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit* (32:7–8). Here, one could argue that the first verse, which discusses the first state of the human being's creation, mentions his being created from the earth, and this is something common to all members of the species, while the third verse mentions his being proportioned and receiving God's spirit, which signifies his perfection as a human being. The use of the conjunction *then* in the verses signifies that a period of time elapsed between the beginning of the human being's creation from the earth and his manifestation of his perfection. Then, so the argument goes, this time lapse is none other than the time that passed as he evolved to perfection from lesser species, especially because *an extract* is indefinite (*nakirah*), which signifies generality.

However, the problem with this reading is that *then He proportioned him* is connected to *commenced* rather than *he made*. Therefore, the verse concerns the appearance of the human species via the creative act; the commencement of his creation is the creation of Adam from clay, while his descendants' creation was from *an extract of a base fluid*. In both cases—whether from clay or a base fluid—the creation is completed by proportioning them and breathing into them of God's spirit.

This is the correct reading of the verse because it is in closest accord with the language of the verse itself; it does not require us to interpret *then He made his progeny from an extract of a base fluid* as referring to intermediate stages of human development between God commencing the creation from clay and then proportioning him and breathing into him of his spirit. Just because *an extract* is indefinite does not mean that it signifies generality, as an indefinite noun only signifies generality when it is part of a negation (*nafi*), not when it is part of an affirmation as it is here.

There are still other verses proponents of evolution might invoke to support their case that are connected to the creation of the human being or Adam in the way outlined above. However, the answers to all of these attempts are more or less the same as those we have presented above, so there is no need to expend further space on discussing them.

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Verses 15–30

These verses invoke the essential meaning of faith (*īmān*) to draw a distinction between the believers and the sinners and wrongdoers, mentioning the distinguishing features of each category and the consequences they will face, before warning the wrongdoers of punishment in this world. Finally, they conclude the sūrah by instructing the Prophet to anticipate God's judgement.

Commentary

إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهَا خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(32:15) ***Only those believe in Our signs who, when they are reminded of them, fall down in prostration and celebrate the praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant.***

Having spoken about the disbelievers who stubbornly deny that they will encounter Him and haughtily refuse to believe and do righteous deeds in this world, God now turns to describing the faithful, who believe in the signs of their Lord and submit themselves to the truth when they are reminded.

Only those believe in our signs who… This makes belief (*īmān*) in the true sense of the word exclusive to those whom God describes herein, and it means that "the mark of readiness for true belief is as follows…."

…when they are reminded of them, fall down in prostration… Here, God mentions some of their qualities and some of their deeds. The quality He singles out for mention is their humility toward the position of lordship and the absence of any arrogance or disdain towards submitting themselves to God, or glorifying and praising Him. This is contained in the phrase *when they are reminded of them*, that is, of the signs which point to God's exclusive lordship and divinity, and the logical corollaries of these such as the Resurrection and the prophetic call to faith and good deeds. *Fall down in prostration* means that they drop to the ground and

prostrate to God out of humility and submission. *And celebrate the praise of their Lord* means that they declare Him utterly transcendent above His creation (*tanzīh*) while at the same time glorifying and magnifying Him. And, even though prostration, celebration and praise are acts, here they are manifestations of deeper characteristics of humbleness and obedience toward the ranks of lordship and divinity. That is why God follows them by mentioning their corollary: *and they are not arrogant*.

تَتَجَافَىٰ جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(32:16) ***Their sides vacate their beds to supplicate their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend out of what We have provided them.***

This verse defines them in term of their actions, just as the previous verse defined them in terms of their qualities.

Their sides vacate **(tatajāfī junūbuhum)** ***their beds:*** *Tajāfī* means "to withdraw" and *junūb* is the plural of *janb*, meaning "flank." The word used for *beds* here is *maḍājiʿ*, which is the plural of *maḍjaʿ*, which can refer to any place of sleep. The image of them vacating their beds is meant to suggest that they forgo sleep.

…to supplicate their Lord in fear and hope: This sentence is a circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for the pronoun *their* in *their sides*. This means that they are occupied with supplicating to their Lord in the middle of the night when most others are asleep. But this is not merely out of fear of His wrath such that they would lose hope in His mercy, nor purely out of desire for His reward such that they would feel secure from His anger and devising; rather they supplicate to Him in both hope and fear, observing the etiquette of servanthood in their supplication based on what guidance has driven them to. As a whole, this description of them vacating their beds and supplicating includes the supererogatory night prayers.

…and they spend out of what We have provided them—this is another one of their deeds, namely spending in the Way of God.

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَا أُخْفِيَ لَهُمْ مِنْ قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(32:17) ***No soul*** **(nafs)** ***knows what has been kept hidden for them***

of comfort* (qurrat aʿyun)[1] *as a reward for what they used to do.

This follows logically from their qualities and actions above, and it describes the reward that God has promised them as a result.

The appearance of the term *nafs* as an indefinite noun subject to a negation signifies the generality of its meaning, while joining *qurrah* to *aʿyun* ("eyes") rather than *aʿyunihim* ("their eyes") shows that this hidden comfort is not just comfort for them but for whoever has eyes.

The verse means: "Not a single soul can know or even imagine what God has in store for them in terms of comfort to recompense them for their deeds in this world."

أَفَمَنْ كَانَ مُؤْمِنًا كَمَنْ كَانَ فَاسِقًا ۚ لَا يَسْتَوُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(32:18) ***Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal.***

"Faith" (*īmān*) means for the soul to settle upon something that it knows, and the logical corollary of this is for a person to act upon what they have faith in. "Transgression" (*fisq*) means to do the opposite of this. The original meaning of *fisq* comes from *fasaqat al-tamrah* ("the date splits") which describes the date coming out of its skin, in the same sense that a *fāsiq* ("sinner") comes out from obedience to God.

The question in this verse is rhetorical, intended to evoke a denial. *They are not equal* denies that the two groups are alike to emphasise the meaning of the rhetorical question at the beginning of the verse.

أَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْمَأْوَىٰ نُزُلًا بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(32:19) ***As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, for them are gardens of the Abode, a hospitality for what they used to do.***

An "abode" (*maʾwā*) is the place in which a person takes shelter in order to rest. "Hospitality" (*nuzul*) literally means the food and drink that is prepared in a house for a guest, but some say that it came to signify any

1 Lit. "coolness of the eyes" (Trans.)

kind of gift. The remainder of the verse is clear.

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فَسَقُوا فَمَأْوَاهُمُ النَّارُ ۖ كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(32:20) ***As for those who have transgressed, their refuge is the Fire. Whenever they seek to leave it, they will be turned back into it, and they will be told: Taste the punishment of the Fire which you used to deny.***

When God says that their "refuge" is the Fire, this is to show that they have no escape from it, which is why He follows immediately by saying: *Whenever they seek to leave it, they will be turned back into it*.

Taste the punishment of the Fire which you used to deny shows that those who have transgressed refers to the deniers of the Resurrection. God addresses them with these words while they are in the Fire to shame them, because they would often shame the faithful in this world for believing in the Resurrection.

وَلَنُذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(32:21) ***We shall surely make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater punishment, so that they may come back.***

Insofar as the purpose behind the punishment is for them to return, and the return desired from them is to return to God through repentance, then *the nearer punishment* must refer to the punishment that befalls them in this world to frighten them and warn them in order to repent, rather than the punishment of destruction in this world[1] or the punishment that awaits them after they die. Based on this, *the greater punishment* is the punishment of the Day of Resurrection.

Therefore, the verse means: "I swear that we will make them taste the punishment near at hand, such as scarcity, illness, and killing, before the greatest punishment on the Day of Resurrection so that perhaps they will return to Us and repent for their polytheism and obstinacy."

Some say that the punishment of this world is called *the nearer punishment* rather than "the least punishment" (*al-ʿadhāb al-aṣghar*) to contrast

1 As befell the people of Noah or Ṣāliḥ, for instance. (Trans.)

with "the greatest punishment" (*al-ʿadhāb al-akbar*) because this verse occurs in the context of a warning and a threat, in which case it is not appropriate to call any punishment "the least." By the same token, one does not call the punishment of the Hereafter "the furthest punishment" (*al-ʿadhāb al-abʿad*) in contrast to "the nearest punishment" (*al-ʿadhāb al-adnā*) because this also does not fit the context of a threat.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا ۚ إِنَّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنْتَقِمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(32:22) ***Who is a greater wrongdoer than him who is reminded of his Lord's signs, whereat he disregards them? Indeed We shall take vengeance upon the guilty.***

It is as if this is supposed to provide a rationale for *the greatest punishment* mentioned above insofar as they deny it; therefore, it explains that because they are the worst kind of wrongdoers (as they have turned away from God's signs after being reminded of them), they are therefore guilty, and God will exact vengeance upon them.

The sentence *Who is a greater wrongdoer…* explains the reason for their punishment, namely that they are the worst kind of wrongdoer. Then, the sentence *Indeed We shall take vengeance upon the guilty* explains that the wrongdoers will be punished because they are guilty and the punishment is a kind of vengeance against them, for it is God who takes vengeance upon the guilty.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَلَا تَكُنْ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِنْ لِقَائِهِ ۖ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(32:23) ***Certainly We gave Moses the Book, Do not be in doubt about his encounter, and We made it a guidance for the Children of Israel.***

The Book (*al-kitāb*) here refers to the Torah.

Commentators have differed about whom the pronoun *his* belongs to in *his encounter* (*liqāʾihi*) and to what this word refers. Some say that the pronoun belongs to Moses and acts as an object (*mafʿūl*) for *encounter*, rendering the meaning: "Do not be in doubt about your encounter with

Moses"—this addresses the Prophet regarding his meeting with Moses during the Night Journey (*al-miʿrāj*), which is recounted in narrations.

If this sūrah was revealed after the Night Journey, then it is a reminder of this event, and if it was revealed beforehand, then it is a promise from God to the Prophet that he will see him.

Others have said the pronoun belongs to Moses and that the sentence means: "Do not be in doubt about your meeting Moses on the Day of Resurrection."

Others have said the pronoun belongs to the Book and that the sentence means: "So do not be in doubt about Moses' encounter with the Book."

Still others have said it means: "Do not be in doubt about your encounter with the Book" or "…about the Book's encounter with *you*."

Another reading has the pronoun refer to the distress Moses suffered from his people, in which case the meaning becomes: Do not doubt that you will suffer persecution, just as Moses suffered it from his people.

However, it should be obvious to the reader that these readings are fundamentally unsound as they do not explain how this verse is relevant to the ones that came before it.

It is possible—and God knows best—that the pronoun belongs to God Himself and *his encounter* refers to the Resurrection insofar as that is the day when everyone will be present before their Lord without any barrier between them and Him, as we have already discussed. The Resurrection was already described as an "encounter" (*liqāʾ*) some verses ago: *Rather they disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord* (32:10). Then a similar meaning is expressed by the verse: *Were you to see when the guilty hang their heads before their Lord* (32:12).

It is also possible that *his encounter* refers to the fact that the Prophet's attention is completely absorbed by God when the Qur'an is being revealed to him, as indicated in some narrations, in which case this harks back to the opening of the sūrah: *The sending down of the Book, there is no doubt in it, from the Lord of all the worlds* (32:2). The coda of the verse appears to support this reading more than the former—and God knows best.

…and We made it a guidance* (hudan) *for the Children of Israel—meaning "a guide" (*hādī*), where the verbal noun carries the meaning of an active participle (*ism fāʿil*) or the hyperbolic meaning of the verb.

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا ۖ وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(32:24) ***And amongst them We appointed imams to guide by Our command, when they had been patient and had conviction in Our signs.***

Meaning: "We appointed imāms amongst the Children of Israel to guide people by Our command, and We only appointed them as imams to guide people when they were steadfast in their religion and, before that, had certainty about Our signs."

We have already discussed the meaning of imamate and of the imam guiding by God's command in our commentary on the verses: *I will make you an Imām of mankind* (2:124), *We made them imāms, guiding by Our command* (21:73), and others that are relevant to the discussion.

These two verses cover the mercy that is extended to mankind in the Torah; it is a guidance in itself that leads whoever follows it to the truth, and it has nurtured and educated those people whom God selected to be imams who would themselves guide others by its command. Therefore, the Torah was a source of blessings both when it was acted upon and after it was acted upon.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(32:25) ***Indeed your Lord will separate between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ.***

This refers to their differences in religion, which only came about as a result of the enmity between them, as God mentions elsewhere: *Certainly We gave the Children of Israel the Book… But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of spite among themselves. Indeed your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ* (45:16–17).

So the meaning of *separate between them* is to judge in a way that separates truth from falsehood, and the people of truth from the people of falsehood. The remainder of the meaning is clear.

أَوَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ يَمْشُونَ فِي مَسَاكِنِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ ۖ أَفَلَا يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(32:26) ***And does it not dawn upon them*** **(a wa lam yahdi lahum)** ***how many generations We have destroyed before them, amid***

whose dwellings they walk? There are indeed signs in that. Will they not then listen?

The conjunction *and* (wa) at the beginning of the verse is joined to an implicit sentence with the meaning: "Is this not clear to them *and does it not dawn upon them*…?" And the meaning of *yahdi lahum* (lit. "to guide for them") is "to become clear for them", which is implied by the use of the preposition *la-* to make the verb transitive.

…how many generations We have destroyed before them: This sentence fulfils the function of the subject of the verb *yahdi*. And the meaning is: "Can they not see the multitude of generations we have destroyed even while they are walking amongst their houses!"

There are indeed signs in that. Will they not then listen? By "listen", God means to pay heed to admonition, as this will lead to the acceptance of the truth and obedience to it.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ وَأَنْفُسُهُمْ ۖ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(32:27) ***Do they not see that We drive water (*nasūq al-mā*) to the parched earth* (al-arḍ al-juzur) *and with it We bring forth crops* (zarᶜ) *of which they eat, themselves and their cattle? Will they not then see?***

According to *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, the verb *sūq* means to drive something along a route and *juzur* means a dry land that has become barren due to the lack of rain.

Zarᶜ is actually a verbal noun (with the literal meaning of "sowing") but here is used in the sense of the passive participle *mazrūᶜ* (lit. "that which is sown", that is, "crops").

This verse mentions another sign of God's good governance of His creation and especially the living parts of it such as humans and cattle. Driving water to a barren land means driving the clouds that carry rain to it, as when rain falls from these clouds, it brings life to the earth, from which plants sprout forth, from which humans eat, as do the animals which they have domesticated to serve them.

Will they not then see? This is both an exhortation and a reprimand. God specifically connects this verse to sight and connects the previous

verse to hearing because it is only possible for one to hear about the destruction of previous nations, as these are traditions passed down by word of mouth. On the other hand, it is through sight that one apprehends water being driven to barren lands, plants growing from these, and then these plants being eaten by animals and humans.

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وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا الْفَتْحُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾ قُلْ يَوْمَ الْفَتْحِ لَا يَنْفَعُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِيمَانُهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْظَرُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(32:28–29) ***And they say, When will this judgement* (fatḥ) *be, should you be truthful? Say, On the day of judgement their faith shall not avail the faithless, nor will they be granted any respite.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Fatḥ* means to unbar or remove an obstacle… doing *fatḥ* of an issue (*qaḍiyyah*) means to settle its affair and remove any obstacles from it. God says: *Our Lord! Judge* (iftaḥ) *justly between us and our people, and You are the best of judges!*" (7:89)

In the prior verses, there are two issues to which *fatḥ* in the sense of "judgement" could apply: first, judgement between them on the day of resurrection, and the other is to make them taste the nearer punishment (*al-ʿadhāb al-adnā*) or to exact revenge upon them in this world. That is why some commentators have explained *fatḥ* to mean the day of resurrection, in which case the question *when will this judgement be, should you be truthful?* has the same meaning as the question repeated throughout the Qur'an: *When will this promise be fulfilled, should you be truthful?* (10:48, 21:38, 27:71, 34:29, 36:48, 67:25)

Meanwhile, others have said that this *fatḥ* refers to the Battle of Badr, as the belief of the idolaters will avail them nothing after they are slain.

Still others have said that *fatḥ* refers to the conquest of Mecca. However, the answer that the Qur'an gives in response to this question does not make sense if that is the case: *On the day of judgement their faith shall not avail the faithless, nor will they be granted any respite*. That is, unless one were to say that their faith on that day, having stubbornly opposed and fought the Prophet for so many years, and having done their utmost to extinguish God's light, is not genuine belief but hypocrisy (*nifāq*). In other words, they make a show of faith, but it does not enter their hearts such that their souls may benefit from it, as they have been

forced to believe and not granted any respite.

This *fatḥ* could also refer to God judging between the Prophet and the Muslim *ummah*, and that would take place during the End Times, as we have already indicated in our explanation of the verse *there is a messenger for every nation* (10:47).

In any case, these two verses respond to the idolaters' impatience for judgement by saying that it is a judgement after which the faith of the disbelievers will be of no benefit to them, as it is a situation in which no soul will profit by believing and in which no one will be spared punishment or granted respite.

فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَانْتَظِرْ إِنَّهُمْ مُنْتَظِرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(32:30) ***So turn away from them, and wait. They too are waiting.***

This verse instructs the Prophet to disregard them and wait for God's judgement just as they are waiting. However, they are really waiting for him to die or be killed so that his mission will be thwarted. So, the Qur'an says that the Prophet should wait for God's judgement just as they are waiting for his death so that God may give truth victory over falsehood and the people of truth victory over the people of falsehood.

Hence, from the context it is clear that this *fatḥ* is referring to something that will take place in this world rather than the Hereafter.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates from Ibn ʿAbbās: The Prophet said, "*Their sides vacate their beds* (32:16). They are those who do not sleep before the time of *ʿishāʾ* and so God praises them"—and when he mentioned this, a man began to avoid his bed out of fear he would fall asleep. "Its time is before the young go to bed but when the elderly begin to feel sluggish."

Author's comments: The same has been narrated by other routes, both connected and truncated. Shaykh al-Ṭūsī relates a similar tradition in his *Amālī* with a chain from Imām al-Ṣādiq about this verse. It reads: "They would not sleep until darkness had settled."

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated via Sulaymān ibn Khālid:
Imām al-Bāqir said, "Shall I not tell you about Islam: its root, its

branch and its canopy?"
I said, "Of course, may I be your ransom!"
He said, "Its root is prayer, its branch is *zakāt*, and its canopy is *jihād*."
Then he said, "If you like, I will tell you about the gates of goodness?"
I said, "Yes! May I be your ransom!"
He said, "Fasting is paradise, charity (*ṣadaqah*) takes away mistakes, and a person keeping vigil in the middle of the night remembering God…." Then he recited *Their sides vacate their beds* (32:16).

Author's comments: A tradition with this meaning is narrated in *al-Maḥāsin* with a chain going back to ᶜAlī ibn ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz from Imām al-Ṣādiq, and in *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, from al-Wāḥidī with a chain going back to the Prophet via Muᶜādh ibn Jabal. And it has been related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Tirmidhī, Nasāʾī, Ibn Mājah, and other authorities, all from Muᶜādh, from the Prophet.

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Jarīr relates from Mujāhid:
God's Messenger mentioned night vigils to us. His eyes welled up with tears until they streamed over his cheeks. Then he recited the verse: *Their sides vacate their beds* (32:16).

(4) In the same source, it is related:[1]
When we were with God's Messenger, he described paradise to us. Then he finished and said, "In it are things which no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor any human mind has conceived of." Then he recited the verse: "*Their sides vacate their beds…*" (32:16) and the verse after it.

(5) In *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*, it is narrated:
Imām al-Ṣādiq said, "There is no good deed except that it has a reward expounded in the Qurʾan, except for night prayers,

1 This is related from Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, Muslim, Ṭabarānī, Ibn Jarīr and al-Ḥākim who relate a tradition that Ibn Mardawayh and Muḥammad ibn Naṣr (in his Kitāb al-Ṣalāt) deem authentic, via Abū Ṣakhr, from Abū Ḥāzim, from Sahl ibn Saᶜd.

for God has not expounded their reward because of their tremendousness!"

Then he recited the verse: "*No soul knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do*" (32:17).

(6) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related:[1]

Imām al-Ṣādiq said, "There is no good deed a servant does except that it has a reward mentioned in the Qur'an, except for night prayers, for God has not mentioned their reward because of their tremendousness in His eyes. He says: *Their sides vacate their beds to supplicate their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend out of what We have provided them. No soul knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do* (32:16–17). God shows a particular generosity to His faithful servants every Friday [in Paradise]. Each Friday, God sends the believer an angel with two garments. When it reaches the gate of paradise, it says: 'Seek permission for me to visit so-and-so.' The believer is told: 'This is the messenger of your Lord at the door.' [Upon receiving these garments,] the believer asks his spouses, 'What do you think is best for me to wear?' They say, 'By He who granted your paradise, we see nothing better on you than that which your Lord has sent for you!' So he wraps one around his waist and wears the other as a cloak. Then there is nothing that he walks past save that it lights up for him until he reaches the tryst.

"And when [the believers] gather [on Friday], God reveals Himself to them, and when they look towards Him—meaning to His mercy[2]—they fall down prostrating. Then He says: 'My servants! Raise your heads! This is not a day of prostration or worship. You have been relieved of your burdens!'

"They will say, 'O our Lord! What is better than what you have given us? You have given us paradise!'

"He will respond, 'Whatever you have now, you shall have

1 ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm narrates it from his father, from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Najrān, from ʿĀṣim ibn Ḥamīd.

2 These are the words of the narrator and not the Imam. (Trans.)

seventy-fold!'
"So, every Friday, the believer receives seventy times whatever he already has. This is God's saying *and with Us there is yet more* (50:35). It is Friday—its night is magnanimous and its day is radiant—so make abundant your *tasbīḥ*, *tahlīl*, and *takbīr*, your praise of God, and your invocations of blessings upon God's Messenger!
"As the believer walks [back from the gathering], there is nothing he passes save that it lights up for him, until he reaches his spouses, who tell him, 'By He who granted you paradise! We have never seen you more handsome!'
"He says, 'I looked to the light of my Lord….'"
The narrator said to Imām al-Ṣādiq, "May I be your ransom, tell me more!"
He said, "God created paradise with his own hand; no eye saw it, nor did any creature know of it. The Lord opens it every morning and says: 'Increase in goodness, increase in pleasant scent!' That is God's saying: *No soul knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do* (32:17)."

Author's comments: The end of the narration is an explanation of its beginning.

(7) It is narrated in *al-Kāfī* via a chain of narration from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Maymūn al-Qaddāḥ, from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
Whoever feeds a believer until he is full, none of God's creatures know what reward lies in store for him in the Hereafter. Not even an angel brought near or a prophet sent. Only God, the Lord of the Worlds!

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Abū al-Jārūd narrates from Imām al-Bāqir about the verse, *Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal* (32:18):
ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and al-Walīd ibn ʿUqbah had a disagreement. The sinner, al-Walīd said: "By God, I am more unrestrained in my tongue than you, sharper in my teeth than you, and superior to you in writing!"
Whereat ʿAlī said, "Be silent! You are nothing but a profligate sinner (*fāsiq*)."

Then God sent down the verse: *Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal* (32:18).

Author's comments: This is also narrated in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, from al-Wāḥidī, from Ibn ʿAbbās; and in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, from *Kitāb al-Aghāni*, al-Wāḥidī, Ibn ʿAdī, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Khaṭīb, and Ibn ʿAsākir, and also from Ibn ʿAbbās; from Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Jarīr from ʿAṭāʾ ibn Yasār; from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from al-Siddī from him; and from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from Ibn Abī Laylā as well.

(9) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, it is narrated from al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī, in a tradition in which he disputes with men in the presence of Muʿāwiyah:
And as for you, O Walīd ibn ʿUqbah! By God I do not blame you for hating ʿAlī. After all, he is the one who meted out eighty lashes to you for drinking wine, and killed your father with his own hands at the Battle of Badr. But how can you *revile* him when God has called him a believer in ten different verses of the Qur'an and He has called you a sinner!
And this is the verse: *Is someone who is faithful like someone who is a transgressor? They are not equal* (32:18).

(10) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates from Ibn Idrīs al-Khawlānī:
I asked ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit about the verse *We shall surely make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater punishment* (32:21).
He said, "I asked God's Messenger about it and he said, 'This means the trials, illnesses, and hardships. A punishment in this world for one who is immoderate but not in the Hereafter.' I said, 'O God's Messenger, so what are these things for us?' He said, 'A cleansing and a purification.'"
11. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* in a narration from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq, we read:
The *nearer punishment* is the Beast of the Earth and the Dajjāl.

End of Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Sūrah al-Aḥzāb

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Verses 1-8

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah contains several different sections on teachings, laws, stories, lessons, and moral admonitions. It also recounts the Battle of Khandaq and makes reference to the Jewish tribe, the Banū al-Qurayẓah. The tone of its verses indicate that it was revealed in Medina.

Commentary

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يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَلَا تُطِعِ الْكَافِرِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١﴾

(33:1) ***O Prophet! Be wary of Allah and do not obey the faithless and the hypocrites. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-wise.***

This verse enjoins the Prophet to godwariness in preparation for the prohibition: *do not obey the faithless and the hypocrites*.

The tone of the prohibition, which combines the faithless and the hypocrites together and forbids the Prophet from obeying them, indicates that the faithless were asking for something that God was not pleased with and that the hypocrites were supporting their request. This is something that God in His knowledge and His wisdom had decided against and sent down revelation to this effect. However, what God is asking of His Prophet appears to be something hard that could not normally be attained without God's help. So God cautions him against acceding to their request and enjoins him instead to follow what God has revealed to him and to rely on God alone.

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This supports those narrations about the occasion of this verse's

revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) which say that, after the Battle of Uḥud, a number of leaders of the Quraysh had entered Medina with a guarantee of safe passage from the Prophet and proposed that he leave them and their gods alone and, in return, they would leave him and his god alone. Then this verse was revealed, and the Prophet did not agree to this. We will treat this in detail when we look at the narrations, below.

Based on the above, it becomes clear why God finishes the verse with the formula, *Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-wise* and why He follows it with the next two verses.

وَاتَّبِعْ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿٢﴾

(33:2) ***And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. Indeed Allah is well aware of what you do.***

Read in isolation, the meaning of this verse is general. However, insofar as it occurs in the context of a prohibition, it enjoins the Prophet to follow what has been revealed to him with regards to the request of the disbelievers and the hypocrites and to put it into practice. This is demonstrated by the latter part of the verse: *Indeed Allah is well aware of what you do*.

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿٣﴾

(33:3) ***And put your trust in Allah; Allah suffices as trustee.***

Like the verse before it, this verse has a general meaning when seen on its own. However, in the context of the aforementioned prohibition, it bids the Prophet to trust in God with regards to the commands of revelation. This suggests that whatever is being asked of him is difficult to accomplish by normal means, such that one's heart cannot help but worry unless it relies upon God, for He is the one means (*sabab*) that no other means can overcome.

مَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ لِرَجُلٍ مِنْ قَلْبَيْنِ فِي جَوْفِهِ ۚ وَمَا جَعَلَ أَزْوَاجَكُمُ اللَّائِي تُظَاهِرُونَ مِنْهُنَّ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ ۚ وَمَا جَعَلَ أَدْعِيَاءَكُمْ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ قَوْلُكُمْ بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ ۖ وَاللَّهُ يَقُولُ الْحَقَّ وَهُوَ يَهْدِي السَّبِيلَ ﴿٤﴾

(33:4) ***Allah has not put two hearts within any man nor has He***

made* (jaʿala) *your wives whom you repudiate by* ẓihār *your mothers nor has he made your adopted sons* (adʿiyāʾ) *your sons. That is a mere utterance of your mouths. But Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the way.

This alludes to the impossibility of holding two contradictory beliefs at the same time, as this would require someone to have two hearts, two souls, and two minds. But God has only given a person one of these. Therefore, a single person cannot simultaneously assent to two mutually exclusive propositions. *Within* (fī jawfihi) is used here to add emphasis, as *in the breasts* is used in the verse *…but the hearts turn blind, those that are in the breasts!* (22:46)

Some say that this sentence is meant to serve as a preliminary for what follows by providing a rationale for abolishing the practices of *ẓihār* divorce and adoption, as the latter places a wife in the position of her husband's mother, while adoption here means claiming that someone else's son is in fact your own. Hence, one woman cannot be a man's wife and at the same time as his mother, nor can another's son be one's own, as these are two contradictory statuses that cannot be combined, just as God has not placed two hearts inside any man.

However, it is also plausible that this sentence is meant to serve as a rationale for the earlier injunctions: *do not obey the faithless and the hypocrites* (33:1) and *follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord* (33:2). This is because loyalty and obedience to God and loyalty and obedience to the faithless and the hypocrites are as mutually exclusive as monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and polytheism (*shirk*). The two cannot both exist within a single heart, and God has not placed two hearts inside any man.

…nor has He made* (jaʿala) *your wives whom you repudiate by* ẓihār *your mothers:[1] During the Age of Ignorance, a man would say to his wife: "You are to me as my mother's back" (*anti minnī ka-ẓahr ummī*) or "Your back to me is as my mother's back" (*ẓahruki ʿalayya ka-ẓahr ummī*). In other words, he would draw a comparison between his wife's back (*ẓahr*) and his mother's. This was called *ẓihār* (derived from the same root as the Arabic word for "back") and was a form of divorce that Islam abolished.

So the upshot of the verse is that God does not make those wives of

1 This is also translated as, *nor has He made your wives whose backs you liken to the backs of your mothers as your mothers.* (Pub.)

yours whom you divorce using *ẓihār* into mothers for you. And if that is the case, then these words have no effect. Here, the word *jaʿl* is being used in the sense of legislation (*tashrīʿ*), meaning that these words have no effect in the eyes of the law.

…nor has he made your adopted sons* (adʿiyāʾ) *your sons: *Adʿiyāʾ* is the plural of *daʿī*, which means a child that a person claims as his own. This practice was common amongst both the pre-Islamic Arabs and other civilizations, such as the Persians and Romans. Adopted children in these cultures enjoyed all the same legal statuses as a natural son in terms of inheritance, consanguinity, etc. And this is something that Islam also abolished.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is that God has not made those children you claim as your own your actual children, such that the same laws apply to them as your natural children.

That is a mere utterance of your mouths. But Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the way: The demonstrative pronoun *that* refers either to *ẓihār* divorces and adoption that were just mentioned, *or* just to adoption. The latter is closer to the apparent meaning of the text, and this is supported by the fact that the following verse only deals with the rules for adoption.

A mere utterance of your mouths—meaning that attributing an adopted son to yourselves is merely something you say without any basis in reality, which alludes to the absence of it having any effect, as we see in the verse: *These are mere words that he says* (23:100).

But Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the way—when God says He speaks the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), this means that whatever He says corresponds to reality and that if He promulgates a law, then that law has actual consequences and brings about a genuine benefit (*maṣlaḥah*).

He guides to the way means that He carries those whom He guides along the way of truth in which lies all goodness and happiness. These two statements hint that you should forsake your utterances and instead hold fast to what God says.

ادْعُوهُمْ لِآبَائِهِمْ هُوَ أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ۚ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَعْلَمُوا آبَاءَهُمْ فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ
فِي الدِّينِ وَمَوَالِيكُمْ ۚ وَلَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ فِيمَا أَخْطَأْتُمْ بِهِ وَلَٰكِنْ
مَا تَعَمَّدَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ۝٥

(33:5) ***Call them by their fathers*** **(li-ābāʾihim).** ***That is more just*** **(aqsaṭ)** ***with Allah. And if you do not know their fathers, then they are your brethren in the faith and your kinsmen. There will be no sin upon you for any mistake that you may make therein, barring what your hearts may premeditate. And Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful.***

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The *lām* in *li-ābāʾihim* signifies exclusiveness. In other words: "Call them *and them alone* after their fathers", meaning attribute them to their fathers.

That is more just with Allah: *That* refers to the infinitive form of *call them* (that is, "Calling them after their fathers *is more just with Allah*"), as in the verse: *Be fair; that is nearer to Godwariness* (5:8). *Aqsaṭ* is the comparative form of *qisṭ* ("justice").

Therefore, the meaning of this part of the verse is: "Attribute them to their fathers when you call them, for calling them after their fathers is more just in the eyes of God."

And if you do not know their fathers, then they are your brethren in the faith and your kinsmen: Not knowing their fathers means not to know their fathers personally. This means: "If you do not know their fathers, then do not attribute them to anyone else. Instead, call them brothers and kinsmen in faith."

There will be no sin upon you for any mistake that you may make therein, barring what your hearts may premeditate: Meaning, there is no sin for you if you make a mistake because you were inattentive (*sahw*) or forgetful (*nisyān*) and called them by someone other than their fathers. However, if you do that intentionally, this is sinful.

And Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful: This refers to situations where someone has made a mistake.

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النَّبِيُّ أَوْلَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ وَأَزْوَاجُهُ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ ۗ وَأُولُو الْأَرْحَامِ
بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ إِلَّا أَن
تَفْعَلُوا إِلَىٰ أَوْلِيَائِكُم مَّعْرُوفًا ۚ كَانَ ذَٰلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَسْطُورًا ﴿٦﴾

(33:6) ***The Prophet is more entitled to the faithful than their own selves*** **(min anfusihim),** ***and his wives are their mothers; The blood relatives*** **(ūlū al-arḥām)** ***are more entitled to one another in the***

Book of Allah than* (min) *the faithful and Emigrants, barring any favour you may do your comrades. This has been written in the Book.

The *anfus* of the faithful are none other than the faithful. So when the Qur'an says that the Prophet is *more entitled* (awlā) to them than they are to their own selves, this means he is more entitled to them than they are. Entitlement (*awlawiyyah*) means that when there is a choice between two or more sides, preference is given to one in particular; the one that is given preference is said to be "more entitled" (*awlā*). In the context of the verse, this means that whatever protectiveness, loyalty, affection, generosity, or inclination a believer feels towards himself, the Prophet is more entitled to that than is the believer's own self! So if there is a situation where the believer must choose between himself and the Prophet in some matter, he should give preference to the Prophet over himself.

This means that if the Prophet is in some danger, the believer should protect him with his own self and sacrifice himself for the Prophet. It means that the believer should hold the Prophet in higher affection and esteem than he holds himself. It means that if his self invites him to something but the Prophet invites him to the opposite, or if his self wants something but the Prophet wants the opposite, then the believer will act in accordance with the Prophet's wishes and place them before his own.

Equally, this verse shows that the Prophet is more entitled to them (*awlā*) in both worldly and religious matters, as the meaning of the verse is categorical (*muṭlaq*): *The Prophet is more entitled to the faithful than their own selves.*

Based on the above, the weakness is apparent in the claim made by some that *more entitled* only refers to the prophetic summons (*daʿwah*), so that if he summons them to something but their selves invite them to something else, then they should obey the Prophet and disobey themselves. If this was the case, the verse would be identical in meaning with *…obey the Messenger…* (4:59), *We did not send any messenger but to be obeyed by Allah's leave* (4:64), and other verses. However, this reading is to be discounted because of the categorical meaning of the verse, which means it extends further than this.

The same is true of the reading that says the verse means that his status in relation to them is superior to their status to one another. The latter being indicated by the verses *greet yourselves with a salutation from*

Allah (24:61) and *the faithful, men and women, are comrades of one another* (9:71). This meaning is not supported by the tenor of the verse under discussion.

…and his wives are their mothers: A legislative fiat (*jaʿl tashrīʿī*) to the effect that they are in the same position to them as their mothers, both with regards to the respect due to them and the prohibition on marrying them after the Prophet The latter point is made explicit in the coming verse: *nor may you ever marry his wives after him* (33:53).

Of course, this does not extend the full legal status of a mother to them in matters such as entitling them a share of the faithful's inheritance, making it permissible to look at their faces, or prohibit their daughters from marrying the faithful on the grounds of consanguinity.

The blood relatives* (ūlū al-arḥām) *are more entitled to one another in the Book of Allah than* (min) *the faithful and Emigrants: *Arḥām* is the plural of *raḥm*, which is the womb of the mother and, insofar as all familial relation must ultimately go back to a single womb, the word "womb" is used to express these relations. Hence relations are called *ūlū al-arḥām* (lit. "people of wombs").

The blood relatives are more entitled to one another means in terms of inheritance. *The Book of Allah* refers to either the Guarded Tablet, the Qur'an, or the present sūrah.

…the faithful and the Emigrants are the ones whom they are more entitled than. The meaning here is that blood relations are more entitled to one another than the Emigrants and the faithful who used to inherit from them by virtue of religious brotherhood. This priority is in the Book of God. And perhaps the clause, *than the faithful and the Emigrants* can be read as, *of the faithful and the Emigrants*, in which case it describes *the blood relatives* (that is, *the blood relatives of the faithful and the Emigrants are more entitled to one another*).

This verse abrogates the practice of the believers inheriting from one another by virtue of emigration and brotherhood in faith that was instituted at the advent of Islam.

…barring any favor you may do your comrades. This has been written in the Book: This is an exception in which the subject of the exception is of a different species to the general category from which it is being exempted (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*). Favor (*maʿrūf*) here refers to anything that is willed to them by the deceased in the form of a testament (*waṣiyyah*), which the

divine law limits to no more than a third of a person's inheritance.

This has been written in the Book: Meaning, the ruling of a *favor* in the form of a testament is written in the Guarded Tablet, the Qur'an, or the sūrah.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَمِنْكَ وَمِنْ نُوحٍ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ ۖ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا ﴿٧﴾

(33:7) ***When We took from the Prophets their pledge, and from you and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary, and We took from them a harsh pledge.***

The pledge (*mīthāq*) is made the possession of *their*, meaning the Prophets, to show that this pledge was specific to them, as is also implied by their description as prophets. Therefore, this is a pledge that is exclusively theirs insofar as they are prophets. And this means it is not the same as the pledge that was taken from all mankind to which God refers in the verse:

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, Am I not your Lord? They said, Yes indeed! We bear witness, lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, Indeed we were unaware of this (7:172).[1]

God has also mentioned the pledge obtained from the prophets elsewhere:

When Allah took a compact concerning the prophets, Inasmuch as I have given you of the Book and wisdom, should an apostle come to you thereafter confirming what is with you, you shall believe in him and help him. He said, Do you pledge and accept My covenant on this condition? They said, We pledge (3:81).

The verse under discussion here does not specify the details of the pledge taken from the Prophets, although it does indicate that this is something to do with their prophethood. However, we can deduce from the aforementioned verse (3:81) that this was a pledge taken on them remaining united in the message of their faith and not differing with one another about it, as God says:

Indeed this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord.

1 See English volume 16. (Pub.)

So worship Me. (21:92)

He has made plain to you of the religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus to maintain the religion and do not divide yourselves (42:13).

The Prophets are mentioned here first with a general term that includes all of them, then five of them are singled out with a conjunction, *and from you and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary*. The meaning of this conjunction is to highlight them over and above the other Prophets, as if to say: "When we took the pledge from the five of you and from the other prophets too."

They are only singled out in this way because of their great rank and elevated station, as these are the Prophets endowed with resoluteness (*ūlū ʿazm*), who brought new codes and scriptures. God mentions them in their historical order, beginning with Noah, then Abraham, then Moses, and finally Jesus However, He mentions the Prophet first, even though he is the last of them to come, because of his superiority and nobility above all of them.

…*and We took from them a harsh pledge* (mīthāq ghalīẓ)—emphasizing the strength of the pledge, similar to the verse:

*And when Our edict came, We delivered Hūd and the faithful who were with him, by a mercy from Us, and We delivered them from a harsh punishment (*ʿadhāb ghalīẓ*).* (11:58)

لِيَسْأَلَ الصَّادِقِينَ عَنْ صِدْقِهِمْ ۚ وَأَعَدَّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿٨﴾

(33:8) *So that He may question the truthful concerning their truthfulness. And He has prepared for the faithless a painful punishment.*

So that… signifies either rationale or purpose, and it is connected to an implicit sentence whose content is indicated by *When We took…. And He has prepared…* is connected to it. The meaning of this implicit sentence is: "He did that (He took the pledge from the Prophets) *so that he could ask the truthful concerning their truthfulness. And He has prepared for the faithless a painful punishment.*"

Note that it does not say: "And so that He could prepare for the faithless a painful punishment." And this shows that the ultimate aim of this

pledge is not to punish them, rather it is only because of their faults that they are punished.

As for questioning the truthful concerning their truthfulness, some say that the truthful (*al-ṣādiqīn*) are the Prophets, and asking them concerning their truthfulness means asking them on the Day of Resurrection about how their nations behaved. This reading is similar in meaning to the verse: *The day Allah will gather the apostles and say, What was the response to you?* (5:109)

Some others say that this means questioning the truthful about God's unity, justice, and His religions; *concerning their truthfulness* means about what they said about Him.

Still others say that it means asking those who were truthful in speech about whether they were also truthful in action.

Yet others say that it means questioning them about their motives for being truthful; did they do it for the sake of God or for some other reason?

And there are many other such readings. However, their weakness should be apparent to the reader.

Careful reflection on, *so that He may question the truthful concerning their truthfulness* suggests an altogether different meaning to those suggested above. There is a difference between saying: "I asked the wealthy about his wealth" or "I asked the learned about his knowledge", and between saying: "I asked Zayd about his property or his knowledge." In the first instance, what is immediately suggested by my words is that I want the person I am questioning to display his wealth or knowledge to me, while in the latter case I am asking whether he has any wealth or knowledge in the first place, or to describe what he has of them.

Therefore, asking the truthful about their truthfulness means asking them to display the truthfulness in their hearts on the level of words and actions, namely their good deeds in this world. With this in mind, *so that He may question the truthful concerning their truthfulness* serves to justify the moral responsibilities they bear on the basis of the pledge they gave by asking them to display the truthfulness hidden in themselves. Of course, this takes place in this world rather than the Hereafter, and this means that the pledge God took from the Prophets must have been at a stage of creation ("the realm of pre-existence") that came before the existence of this world, as is indicated by the verse:

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their

descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, Am I not your Lord? They said, Yes indeed! We bear witness. (7:172)[1]

In short, these two verses are amongst those that point to the existence of a world before this one, in which the pledge (*mīthāq*) was taken. They describe the taking of this pledge from the Prophets and the position and deeds that resulted from them because of this in this world, insofar as anyone who is truthful to his pledge will display his truthfulness.

And in the context of the generality of these verses, the fate of the faithless is also mentioned even though they are not prophets and the pledge taken from the Prophets is what is currently under discussion. It is as if to say: We took a harsh pledge from the Prophets to be unified in their teachings, so that We may ask the truthful and seek for them to fulfil their moral duties and be guided in order to make manifest their truthfulness in belief and practice. In doing this they have earned reward, while a painful punishment awaits the faithless.

Based on this, we can understand why the verse transitions from the first-person ("We") to the third-person ("He"): *When <u>We</u> took… so that <u>He</u> may question*…. This is because even though the pledge to worship Him alone without associating any partner with Him was taken through the medium of the angels (hence, "We"), it is only God who asks the truthful to display their truthfulness and prepares punishments, so that He alone might be worshipped (hence, "He"). So ponder.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, about the verse *O Prophet! Be wary of Allah…* (33:1), we read:

It was revealed concerning Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl, and Abī al-Aʿwar al-Sulamī. They had come to Medina and lodged with ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy after the Battle of Uḥud with a promise of safety from the Messenger of God in order to speak to him. They got up, and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saʿīd ibn Abī Sarḥ, and Ṭuʿmah ibn Ubayraq got up with them, and together they went to the Prophet and said, "O Muḥammad! Stop repudiating our gods, Lāt, ʿUzzā and Manāt, and say instead that they intercede for those who worship them, and we will leave

1 See English volume 16 for a detail discussion by the author on the realm of pre-existence. (Pub.)

you and your Lord alone."
This was a difficult matter for God's Messenger, for ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, "Permit us to kill them, O Messenger of God!"
He replied, "I have given them a promise of safety."
Then they set off from Medina, whereat the verse was revealed *Do not obey the faithless* (33:1) from Mecca—Abū Sufiyān, Abū al-Aʿwar, and ʿIkrimah— *and the hypocrites* (33:1) from Medina—Ibn Ubayy, Ibn Saʿīd, and Ṭuʿmah.

Author's comments: The general outline of this story has been narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Jarīr, from Ibn ʿAbbās. Other occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) have been mentioned for this verse: however, these are not compatible with the tone and contents of the verse, so we have left them aside.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse *nor has he made your adopted sons your sons* (33:4), ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm narrates from his father, from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Jamīl, from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
This verse was revealed because of the following situation. After God's Messenger married Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, he went to trade at the market of ʿUkkāẓ and saw Zayd for sale. He thought him a clever and handsome boy, so he bought him. And when the Prophet began his mission, he invited him to Islam, and he accepted. He was then called "Zayd the bondsman (*mawlā*) of Muḥammad." Then, when word reached Ḥārithah ibn Sharāḥīl al-Kalbī of his son Zayd, he came to Mecca. And he was a noble man. He went to Abū Ṭālib and said, "O Abā Ṭālib! My son was taken captive, and word has reached me that he came into the possession of your nephew. Ask him if he will sell him, ransom him, or free him."
Abū Ṭālib spoke to God's Messenger, who told him, "He is free, so let him go wherever he wishes." Ḥāritha took Zayd's hand and told him, "My son, come back to your noble lineage."
Zayd replied, "I will not leave God's Messenger."
His father said, "You would leave your noble lineage to be a slave of the Quraysh?"
He said, "I shall never leave God's Messenger so long as I live."
Then his father became angry and said, "O assembly of Quraysh! Bear witness that I have disowned him. He is not my son."

So God's Messenger said, "I bear witness that Zayd is my son. I shall inherit from him and he shall inherit from me." So Zayd came to be called "the son of Muḥammad" (*ibn Muḥammad*), and the Prophet loved him very dearly.

When God's Messenger emigrated to Medina, he married Zayd to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. One day he did not see Zayd, so he went to his home to ask after him. And there he saw Zaynab sitting in her room combing her hair. The Prophet stood at the door and looked at her, and she was very beautiful. He said, "Glory to God, the Lord of Light, and Blessed is God the Best of Creators." Then he returned to his home but Zaynab now occupied a strange place in his heart.

Zaynab came home and told Zayd what had happened. Zayd said, "Would you like me to divorce you so that the Prophet can marry you?"

She said, "I fear you will divorce me and the Prophet will not marry me."

So Zayd went to the Prophet and said, "May my parents be your ransom, O Messenger of God. Zaynab told me such-and-such. Would you like me to divorce her so that you can marry her?"

The Prophet told him, "I will not do so, hold fast to your wife and be mindful of God." Then God related this conversation, saying: *[The Prophet said,] Hold fast to your wife, and be mindful of Allah. You concealed inside yourself what Allah would bring to light, and you feared people—although Allah has more right to be feared. And when Zayd had no further want of her, We wedded her to you… And Allah's command is always carried out* (33:37). So God married them from above His throne.

The hypocrites said, "The wives of our sons are forbidden to us while he marries the wife of his son, Zayd!" So God revealed: … *nor has he made your adopted sons your sons… and He guides to the way* (33:4).

Author's comments: This has been narrated with variations in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* by Ibn Mardawayh, from Ibn ʿAbbās.

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, and Ibn Mardawayh relate from Jābir that the Prophet would say:

I am more entitled to every believer than he is to himself. So

whenever any man dies and leaves behind a debt, it comes to me. And whenever anyone dies and leaves behind wealth, it is for his inheritors.

Author's comments: There are other narrations with the same meaning from both Shiʿi and Sunni sources.

(4) In the same work, Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, and al-Nasāʾī relate from Buraydah:
I fought alongside ʿAlī in Yemen and experienced some brusqueness from him. So when I went to God's Messenger, I mentioned ʿAlī's faults. Then I saw the face of God's Messenger change and he told me, "O Burayda! Am I not more entitled to the faithful than themselves?"
I said, "Of course, O Messenger of God!"
Then he said, "Whomsoever I am the master (*mawlā*) of, ʿAlī is his master."

(5) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib narrates a lengthy tradition in which he says:
I heard God's Messenger say, "I am more entitled to the faithful than they are to themselves. And whoever I am more entitled to than himself, you are more entitled to than himself." ʿAlī was sitting in front of him in his home.

Author's comments: This is narrated in *al-Kāfī* from Jaʿfar, from the Prophet And there are countless narrations to this effect from both Shiʿi and Sunni sources.

(6) And in *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated via chain from Ḥanān:
I said to Imām al-Ṣādiq, "What belongs to the bondsmen (*mawālī*)?"
He said, "They have no share in inheritance, save what God has said: *barring any favour you may do your comrades*" (33:6).

(7) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates from Ibn ʿAbbās:
The Prophet was asked, "When was your pledge (*mīthāq*) taken?"
He replied, "When Adam was between the spirit and the body."

Author's comments: This report is narrated word-for-word via various chains from the Prophet, and it means that the pledge was taken in a world before this one.

Verses 9–27

These verses deal with the Battle of Khandaq and the events that followed it with regards to the Banū Qurayẓah. And it is related to the section before it because it mentions keeping one's pledges and breaking them.

Commentary

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَاءَتْكُمْ جُنُودٌ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا وَجُنُودًا لَمْ تَرَوْهَا ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا ﴿٩﴾

(33:9) ***O you who have faith! Remember Allah's blessing upon yu when the hosts came at you, and We sent against them a gale and hosts whom you did not see. And Allah sees best what you do.***

This reminds the faithful of the blessings God granted them during the Battle of Khandaq, which was waged over several days, by granting them His assistance and protecting them from the armies of the polytheists. For their enemies had assembled a great host that was drawn from different peoples and tribes, such as the Ghaṭfān, the Quraysh, the Abyssinians, the Kinānah, and the Jewish tribes of the Banū Qurayẓah and the Banū al-Naḍīr. This force laid siege to them from every direction, but God gave the wind supremacy over them and sent down angels to humiliate them.

This is reflected in God's saying: *O you who have faith! Remember Allah's blessing upon you when…*—"when" is either adverbial (*ẓarf*) for the blessing or to indicate its permanence—*when the hosts came at you*—from the tribes, each one with their own army, such as the Ghaṭfān, the Quraysh, and others—*and We sent*—this elucidates the blessing, which took place after the tribes came—*against them a gale*—the wind of al-Ṣabā, which is a freezing wind on winter nights—*and hosts whom you did not see*—the angels who came to humiliate the idolaters—*And Allah sees best what you do.*

إِذْ جَاءُوكُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنْكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتِ الْأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتِ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ وَتَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونَا ﴿١٠﴾

(33:10) ***When they came at you from above and below you, and when the eyes rolled and the hearts leapt to the throats, and you entertained misgivings about Allah.***

Those who came "from above"—meaning the eastern side of Medina—were the Ghaṭfān, the Banū Qurayẓah, and the Banū Naḍīr, while those who came from "below"—meaning the western side—were the Quraysh, who were accompanied by the Kinānah and the Abyssinians. Therefore, *when they came at you from above and below you* is an exposition of *when the hosts came at you* in the previous verse.

…and when the eyes rolled and the hearts leapt to the throats… is another exposition of *when the hosts came at you*.

The image of eyes rolling and hearts leaping into throats suggest that people were so terrified that they resembled people on their deathbeds, whose souls were about to depart their bodies.

And you entertained misgivings about Allah—meaning that the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was a sickness said to one another things like, "The disbelievers will be victorious and take control of Medina", "Islam will be wiped out and the religion destroyed", "the Age of Ignorance will return as if nothing has changed", "God has deceived the faithful and their prophet", and other such misgivings.

هُنَالِكَ ابْتُلِيَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَزُلْزِلُوا زِلْزَالًا شَدِيدًا ﴿١١﴾

(33:11) ***It was there that the faithful were afflicted and jolted with a severe convulsion.***

The demonstrative pronoun, *there*, refers to a time or place at a distance. In this case, it refers to the time when the armies came to Medina. This was extremely difficult for them. In this verse, *afflicted* means "tested"; *jolted* means to be agitated; severe (*shadīd*) means powerful (*qawī*). There difference between "severe" and "powerful" is that the former tends to be perceived with the senses, while the latter does not. Some say this is why *qawī* is predicated of God directly but not *shadīd*.

The meaning of this verse is: At that time of severity the faithful were tested and were agitated with extreme terror.

وَإِذْ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ مَا وَعَدَنَا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ إِلَّا

غُرُورًا ﴿١٢﴾

(33:12) ***And when the hypocrites were saying, as well as those in whose hearts is a sickness, Allah and His Messenger promised us naught but delusion.***

Those in whose hearts is a sickness refers to those believers who are weak of faith.[1] They are not the same as the hypocrites, who outwardly profess faith while inwardly hide their disbelief. And the hypocrites only refer to the Prophet as God's Messenger because they are making an outward show of faith.

Delusion (*ghurūr*) means to lead a person to evil while making it appear good, and "to be deluded" (*ightirār*) means to allow oneself to be led in this way.

Al-Rāghib says:

To delude someone (*gharartu fulānan*) means to have seized his finest possession (*ghurrah*) and taken from him what you wanted, while *ghirrah* ("inadvertence") means to be heedless while being awake.

Based on the context of the verse, the promise that the hypocrites and weak of faith call a *delusion* from God and His Messenger is the promise of Islam's eventual victory over all religion. This promise appears frequently in the Qur'an, and it is also narrated that the hypocrites would complain, "Muḥammad promised us that we would conquer the palaces of Khosrow and Caesar. Right now we can't even go to the lavatory in safety!"

وَإِذْ قَالَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْهُمْ يَا أَهْلَ يَثْرِبَ لَا مُقَامَ لَكُمْ فَارْجِعُوا ۚ وَيَسْتَأْذِنُ فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمُ النَّبِيَّ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّ بُيُوتَنَا عَوْرَةٌ وَمَا هِيَ بِعَوْرَةٍ ۖ إِنْ يُرِيدُونَ إِلَّا فِرَارًا ﴿١٣﴾

(33:13) ***And when a group of them said, O people of Yathrib! This is no place*** **(muqām)** ***for you, so go back! And a group of them sought the Prophet's permission, saying, Our homes lie exposed, although they were not exposed. They only sought to flee.***

1 See the author's discourse on the "disease of the heart" in English volume 10 under verses 5:51-54. (Pub.)

Yathrib was the name of Medina before Islam, then it came to be known as *Madīnat al-Rasūl* ("the Prophet's City") after the Emigration, before this was eventually shortened to just "*Madīna*." *Muqām* means residence. The phrase *this is no place (*muqām*) for you, so go back* means there is no sense in you staying here to face the armies of the polytheists, as they will surely be victorious, so go back! God follows this by relating what some others had said: *And a group of them sought the Prophet's permission…*—meaning that some of the hypocrites and those who were weak of faith asked the Prophet to go back, saying as an excuse: *Our homes lie exposed*, meaning they were vulnerable to thieves and attacks by the enemy, *although they were not exposed. They only sought to flee* using this as a pretext.

وَلَوْ دُخِلَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَقْطَارِهَا ثُمَّ سُئِلُوا الْفِتْنَةَ لَآتَوْهَا وَمَا تَلَبَّثُوا بِهَا إِلَّا يَسِيرًا ﴿١٤﴾

(33:14) *Had they been invaded from their flanks and had they been asked to apostatize* (fitnah)*, they would have done so with only a mild hesitation.*

In this verse, the things being *invaded from their flanks* are the houses; the remainder of the "they" pronouns refer to the hypocrites and those with a sickness in their hearts. This means "had the enemy entered these houses while these people were inside of them". Based on the context, *fitnah* here means to apostatize and give up their faith.

The meaning of the verse as a whole is: Had the armies of the polytheists entered their homes from the flanks while they were within them, then demanded that their occupants renounce their faith, the hypocrites and those with a sickness in their hearts would have complied, hesitating only long enough to hear the question. This shows that they remain steadfast in their religion only so long as it is easy for them, but as soon as they face hardship, they are ready to give up at a moment's notice.

وَلَقَدْ كَانُوا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ قَبْلُ لَا يُوَلُّونَ الْأَدْبَارَ ۚ وَكَانَ عَهْدُ اللَّهِ مَسْئُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

(33:15) *Though they had certainly pledged to Allah before that they would not turn their backs, and pledges given to Allah are*

accountable.

They would not turn their backs means they would not flee from fighting. This is an exposition of the pledge they made to God, which might refer to the pledge of allegiance (*bayʿah*) they gave to believe in God, His Messenger and whatever the Messenger brings. And, of course, one of the things he brought was to struggle in the way of God (*jihād*), from which it is forbidden to flee. And the meaning of the verse is clear.

قُلْ لَنْ يَنْفَعَكُمُ الْفِرَارُ إِنْ فَرَرْتُمْ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ أَوِ الْقَتْلِ وَإِذًا لَا تُمَتَّعُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٦﴾

(33:16) ***Say, Flight will not avail you should you flee from death or from being killed, and then you will be let to enjoy only for a little while.***

After all, every soul shall die at an appointed time, and not an hour sooner or later than that. Running away will have no effect on that.

And then you will be let to enjoy only for a little while—and even if running away were to avail you, however much time you suppose that might give you, it will only be a little extra and it will invariably come to an end.

قُلْ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَعْصِمُكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ سُوءًا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ رَحْمَةً ۚ وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٧﴾

(33:17) ***Say, Who is it that can protect you from Allah should He desire to cause you ill, or desire to grant you mercy? They will not find for themselves any protector or helper besides Allah.***

The previous verse called the attention of the addressees to the fact that human life has an appointed end, such that fleeing from battle will be of no avail. This verse calls their attention to the fact that good and bad occurrences are entirely dependent upon the will of God—there is nothing that can prevent them from happening, nor is there anyone that can protect the human being from them—therefore it is only prudent to entrust the matter to God's will and to be steadfast in following His commands by placing your trust in Him.

But because of those with a sickness in their hearts, or whose hearts

were preoccupied with their hidden faithlessness, the Qur'an transitions from telling the Prophet to speak to them to speaking to the Prophet directly: *They will not find for themselves any protector or helper besides Allah*.

قَدْ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ الْمُعَوِّقِينَ مِنْكُمْ وَالْقَائِلِينَ لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ هَلُمَّ إِلَيْنَا ۖ وَلَا يَأْتُونَ الْبَأْسَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿١٨﴾ أَشِحَّةً عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ فَإِذَا جَاءَ الْخَوْفُ رَأَيْتَهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ تَدُورُ أَعْيُنُهُمْ كَالَّذِي يُغْشَىٰ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ ۖ فَإِذَا ذَهَبَ الْخَوْفُ سَلَقُوكُمْ بِأَلْسِنَةٍ حِدَادٍ أَشِحَّةً عَلَى الْخَيْرِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ لَمْ يُؤْمِنُوا فَأَحْبَطَ اللَّهُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ﴿١٩﴾

(33:18–19) ***Allah knows those of you who hinder others* (muʿawwiqīn)*, and those who say to their brethren, Come to us!* (halumma) *and they take little part in the battle* (baʾs)*, grudging you* (ashiḥḥatan ʿalaykum)*. So when there is panic, you see them observing you, their eyes rolling, like someone fainting at death* (ka alladhī yaghshā ʿalayhi min al-mawt)*. Then, when the panic is over, they smite you* (salaqūkum) *with sharp tongues in their greed for riches. They never have had faith. So Allah has made their works fail, and that is easy for Allah.***

"To hinder" (*taʿwīq*) means to hold someone back or turn them away from something.

Halumma is a noun of verb (*ism fiʿl*) meaning "come!" (*aqbil*—in the imperative of form IV), which does not have any plural forms in the dialect of the Hejaz. *Baʾs* means "violence and fighting". *Ashiḥḥah* is the plural of *shaḥīḥ*, which means "miserly."

Someone fainting at death means "someone who has lost consciousness and whose eyes roll backwards".

"To smite" (*salq*) means "to lash and strike".

The meaning of these two verses is: God certainly knows those who hinder people from coming to you and turn them away from fighting. These are the hypocrites. And He knows those hypocrites who tell other hypocrites or those with weak faith, "Come to us!" and they do not participate in the fighting except a little, because they are miserly with themselves. And when the signs of battle bring fear, you see them looking at

you aghast and gripped by terror, and their eyes roll like someone who is about to die. Then, when the fear has passed, they rebuke you and strike at you with their sharp tongues, even while they are stingy with the good things that you have won. Such people are neither believers, nor does faith take root in their hearts, no matter how much they might pretend. God has thwarted their deeds and made their works futile. And that is an easy thing for God.

يَحْسَبُونَ الْأَحْزَابَ لَمْ يَذْهَبُوا ۖ وَإِنْ يَأْتِ الْأَحْزَابُ يَوَدُّوا لَوْ أَنَّهُمْ بَادُونَ فِي الْأَعْرَابِ يَسْأَلُونَ عَنْ أَنْبَائِكُمْ ۖ وَلَوْ كَانُوا فِيكُمْ مَا قَاتَلُوا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٢٠﴾

(33:20) ***They suppose the confederates have not left yet, and were the confederates to come, they would wish they were in the desert with the Bedouins asking about your news, and if they were with you, they would fight but a little.***

In other words, their fear is so intense that they think the confederates—the combined armies of the polytheists and their allies that had come against the Prophet—had not really departed. *And were the confederates to come* a second time after they had left Medina *they would wish*—they would desire—*that they were in the desert*—outside of the city in the wilderness—*with the Bedouins asking about your news*—asking about events in Medina—*and if they were with you*—and had not gone out into the desert—*they would fight but a little*—they would not be much use to you even if they stayed with you as they largely stay away from the fighting.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾

(33:21) ***In the Messenger of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar, for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah greatly.***

An "exemplar" (*uswah*) is an example to be followed.

In the Messenger of Allah means in the case of God's Messenger, and the exemplar he sets is one for them to imitate and follow. The expression

there is certainly for you… (laqad kāna lakum) indicates that this is an unchanging fact, and the use of the past continuous tense (in the Arabic) indicates that it is a continuous duty for the faithful to follow him.

The meaning of this verse is: If you believe in the Prophet, then you should follow him in his words and deeds. You see that he suffers for the sake of God, that he is present on the battlefield, and that he strives his utmost for God.

In *al-Kashshāf*, Zamakhsharī writes:

> If someone were to ask: What is the real meaning of God's saying, *In the Messenger of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar*? Comment: There are two ways of reading this. One is that he is a good exemplar in and of himself, meaning he sets a good example to be followed, as you might say "there are twenty measures of iron in a helmet," meaning that it contains that amount of iron in and of its own self. The second aspect is that he possesses a moral quality that is worthy of imitation.

And it is the first of these two readings that is closest to what we have said.

…for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah greatly: "Those who" (*man*) is a permutation (*badal*) of the pronoun in "for you" (*lakum*), to show that imitating God's Messenger is an exceptional quality that not everyone who calls themselves a believer possesses. Rather, it only belongs to those who have true faith and look forward to God and the Last Day, meaning those whose hearts are devoted to God and believe in Him, and whose hearts long for the Last Day and so act righteously and remember God abundantly; such a person never forgets his Lord and so always follows the Prophet in his deeds and behavior.

Some have said that a third-person pronoun cannot be a permutative (*badal*) of a second-person pronoun; therefore, it must either be a relative sentence (*ṣilah*) for *good* (that is, "an example who is good for those who look forward…") or an adjective (*ṣifah*) for it. However, in all three cases, the meaning is virtually the same.

وَلَمَّا رَأَى الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْأَحْزَابَ قَالُوا هَٰذَا مَا وَعَدَنَا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَصَدَقَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ ۚ وَمَا زَادَهُمْ إِلَّا إِيمَانًا وَتَسْلِيمًا ﴿٢٢﴾

(33:22) ***But when the faithful saw the confederates, they said, This***

is what Allah and His Messenger had promised us, and Allah and His Messenger were true. And it only increased them in faith and submission.

This describes the condition of the faithful when they saw the armies of the confederates laying siege to Medina. It was this event that occasioned their right-guidance, insight into faith, and their belief in God and His Messenger, contrary to the doubt and nay-saying that seized the hypocrites and those who were weak of faith. This shows that *the faithful* here refers to those who had dedicated their faith sincerely to God and His Messenger.

…they said, This is what Allah and His Messenger had promised us: *This* refers purely to what they saw, without any specifics, as in the verse: *Then, when he saw the sun rising, he said, This is my Lord!* (6:78)

Regarding the promise they mention, some say that the Prophet had promised that a confederation would come against them and when they saw them approaching, they realized that this was what he had promised.

Others say that they had heard the verse: *Do you suppose that you shall enter paradise though there has not yet come to you the like of those who went before you? Stress and distress befell them and they were convulsed until the apostle and the faithful who were with him said, When is Allah's help? Look! Allah's help is indeed near!* (2:214) And when they saw the enemy approaching, they realized that they would suffer the overwhelming hardships and tribulations the prophets and faithful had suffered before them. So when they saw the confederates, they knew that the promise that God would come to their aid against their enemies was also true.

In truth, both of these interpretations can be correct based on the fact that the speakers combine *Allah and His messenger* in this promise.

…and Allah and His Messenger were true: The faithful bear witness that the promise was true—*And it only increased them in faith and submission*—meaning their faith in God and His messenger and their submission to God's command to support His religion and strive in His way.

مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَضَىٰ نَحْبَهُ
وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَنْتَظِرُ ۖ وَمَا بَدَّلُوا تَبْدِيلًا ﴿٢٣﴾

(33:23) ***Among the faithful are men who fulfil what they have pledged to Allah. Of them are some who have fulfilled their pledge***

(naḥb)*, and of them are some who still wait, and they have not changed in the least.*

Al-Rāghib says:

Naḥb means an obligatory vow (*nadhr*). If someone fulfils their pledge, it means they have paid it in full.

Of them are some who have fulfilled their pledge, and of them are some who still wait: Those "who have fulfilled their pledge" refers to those who have already given their lives, similar to the Arabic idioms "he fulfilled this duration (*qaḍā ajluhu*)", "he ate his fill (*istawfā akluhu*)", or "he got what he needed from this world (*qaḍā min al-dunyā ḥājatahu*)".

…*who fulfil what they have pledged to Allah*—meaning they show that their pledges were truthful by standing their ground when they encounter the enemy. We know that this was their pledge because of the parallel between this verse and the previous verse about the hypocrites: *they had certainly pledged to Allah before that they would not turn their backs* (33:15), just as the verse immediately before the one under discussion ran parallel to the doubt of the hypocrites and their lack of submission to God's command.

and of them are some who still wait: Meaning, of them are some who have met their ends through death or being killed in the way of God, while there are others who await that. But they have not changed in the least from what they pledged and promised before.

لِيَجْزِيَ اللَّهُ الصَّادِقِينَ بِصِدْقِهِمْ وَيُعَذِّبَ الْمُنَافِقِينَ إِنْ شَاءَ أَوْ يَتُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٢٤﴾

(33:24) ***That Allah may reward the true for their truthfulness*** **(bi ṣidqihim)***, and punish the hypocrites, if He wishes, or accept their repentance. Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful.*

That is purposive (*lil-ghāyah*), and the verse as a whole explains the goal behind everything that has been said about the hypocrites and the faithful above.

…that Allah may reward the true for their truthfulness: *The true* (al-ṣādiqīn) refer to the faithful, whose truthfulness has been mentioned already. The *bāʾ* in *bi-ṣidqihim* signifies causation. Thus, the meaning of this phrase is: "That He may reward the faithful who have been true to

their pledge on account of their truthfulness."

And punish the hypocrites, if He wishes, or accept their repentance: Meaning, so that He may punish them if He wishes to punish them, and that is so long as they do not repent or He does not forgive them if they do. And God is all-forgiving, all-merciful.

Because this verse is explaining the goal behind God's actions, there is a subtle point to be observed here, namely that sins can sometimes be a step towards forgiveness and happiness. This is not insofar as they are sins, but insofar as they might cause a soul to feel ashamed and cause it to awaken and repent to its Lord, and wrest itself free from sinning and wrongdoing, so that God will ultimately forgive it.

وَرَدَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِغَيْظِهِمْ لَمْ يَنَالُوا خَيْرًا ۚ وَكَفَى اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الْقِتَالَ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ قَوِيًّا عَزِيزًا ﴿٢٥﴾

(33:25) ***Allah sent back the faithless in their rage, without their attaining any good, and Allah spared the faithful of fighting, and Allah is all-strong, all-mighty.***

Rage (ghayẓ) means a combination of fury and distress. *Good* (khayr) means what the faithless consider to be good, namely victory over the Prophet and the faithful.

The meaning of the verse is: "God sent back the faithless in a state of fury and distress, for they had not succeeded in what they set out to achieve. God spared the faithful from fighting so they did not have to fight, and God has the power to do whatever He wants, for He is all-mighty, and none can overpower him.

وَأَنْزَلَ الَّذِينَ ظَاهَرُوهُمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مِنْ صَيَاصِيهِمْ وَقَذَفَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الرُّعْبَ فَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ وَتَأْسِرُونَ فَرِيقًا ﴿٢٦﴾ وَأَوْرَثَكُمْ أَرْضَهُمْ وَدِيَارَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ وَأَرْضًا لَمْ تَطَئُوهَا ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرًا ﴿٢٧﴾

(33:26–27) ***And He dragged down those who had backed them from among the People of the Book from their strongholds, and He cast terror into their hearts. You killed a part of them and took captive part of them. And He bequeathed you their land, their houses and their possessions, and a territory you had not trodden,***

and Allah has power over all things.

To back someone (*muẓāharah*) means to support them; *ṣayāṣī* (strongholds) is the plural of *ṣīṣiyyah* ("stronghold") and refers to their fortifications. Perhaps it says *dragged down (*anzala*)* instead of "expelled" (*ikhrāj*) because their fortifications were atop a castle or tower. Therefore, they came down from the heights of the walls to their enemies when they were leaving and blockaded.

He dragged down those who backed them: Meaning they aided the polytheists; namely, the Banū Qurayẓah.

From among the people of the book: The Jews.

From their strongholds: From their fortifications.

He cast terror into their hearts: As it is written.

You killed a part of them—meaning the men—*and took captive part of them*—meaning the women and children.

And He bequeathed you—meaning He gave you ownership after them of *their land, their houses and their possessions, and a territory you had not trodden*—which is the land of Khaybar or the land which God gave as booty, which had not been disturbed by horses or mounts; as for those interpretations which say that this refers to every land which will be conquered until the Day of Resurrection, or the land of Mecca, or the land of the Romans and the Persians, these are not in harmony with the tone or context of the verses under discussion. *And Allah has power over all things.*

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb al-Quraẓī and other biographers relate:

During the Battle of Khandaq, some of the Jews, including Salām ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq and Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab, were in a group of the Banū Naḍīr whom the Messenger of God had banished. They left and went to the Quraysh in Mecca, and called them make war on the Messenger of God. They said, "We will stand with you until we wipe them out."

The Quraysh replied, "O group of Jews! You have the original scripture [the Torah]. So is our [traditional, polytheistic] religion better, or Muḥammad's?"

They said, "No, your religion is better than his. You are closer to the truth than him." They are those about whom God says: *Do you*

not behold those who were given a portion of the book? They believe in idols and false deities [or sorcery], and tell the disbelievers, These people [the polytheists] are better guided than those who believe.… Sufficient is Hell to burn them! (4:51-55)

Their words pleased the Quraysh, and they eagerly hastened to what they had been called to. They gathered their forces and made ready. Then that group of Jews left and went to [the tribe of] Ghaṭfān, and called on them make war against the Messenger of God. They told them that they were going to oppose him, and that the Quraysh had granted them their support, and so they also agreed to fight.

Then the Quraysh marched out. Their leader was Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb. The Ghaṭfān also marched forth. They were led by ʿUyaynah ibn Ḥaṣin ibn Ḥudhayfah ibn Badr leading the [Banū] Fazārah, al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAwf leading the [Banū] Murrah, and Musʿir ibn Jabalah al-Ashjaʿī leading those who of the Banū Ashjaʿ who followed them.

The Quraysh wrote to their allies among the Banū Asad, and Ṭalḥah agreed to assist along with his followers from the Banū Asad; these two, the Banū Asad and Banū Ghaṭfān, were allies. The Quraysh also wrote some of the men in the Banū Sulaym, and Abu al-Aʿwar al-Sulamī, along with his followers from the Banū Sulaym, agreed to aid the Quraysh.

When news of this reached the Messenger of God, he encircled Medina with a trench. This was at the suggestion of Salmān al-Fārsī, who at the time was a freeman. It was the first battle that Salmān al-Fārsī witnessed with the Prophet. He said, "O Messenger of God! In Persia, when they besieged us, we used to dig a trench to protect ourselves." So the Messenger of God and the Muslims toiled until they had dug a solid trench.

Majmaʿ al-Bayān then speaks of the signs of the prophethood that emerged during the building of the trench. In it, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥāfiẓ with a chain of narration from Kathīr ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf al-Muzanī, relates that his father said that his father said:

The Messenger of God built the trench in the Year of the Confederates [*yawm al-aḥzāb*, or 5 AH]. It was forty cubits per

man.

My father relates from his father that the Messenger of God laid out the trench in the Year of the Confederates [5 AH]. There were about forty cubits (*dhirāʿan*) per ten men. The Emigrants (Muhājirūn) and the Helpers (Anṣār) disagreed about Salmān al-Fārsī, for he was a strong man. The Helpers said, "Salmān is one of us," and the Emigrants said, "Salmān is one of us," so the Messenger of God said, "Salmān is one of us, the family of the Prophet."

ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf said:

Salmān, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, Nuʿmān ibn Muqarrin, six of the Helpers, and I were along forty cubits [of the trench]. We dug until we reached solid earth, and then, God brought forth from at the bottom of the trench a white, round rock which broke our picks and wearied us. So we said, "Salmān! Go tell the Messenger of God about this rock. Should we dig around it? There is a place near it that we could go around it. Or, let him give us his order about it, for we do not want to deviate from what he has planned." So Salmān went to the Messenger of God, who was in a round tent. He said, "O Messenger of God! A white, round rock has been uncovered in the trench, and it has broken our picks and wearied us. We cannot scrape away anything from it, neither a little nor a lot. What should we do?"

The Messenger of God went with Salmān to the trench, took a pick-axe, and struck the rock with a mighty blow. A flash of lightening sparked from it, illuminating everything between Medina's two black stones [made from black lava flows], until it was like a light shining in a dark night. The Messenger of God said, "God is great!"—an expression of victory—and the Muslims did too. Then he struck another mighty blow, and another flash of lighting burst forth, then a third.

Salman said, "May my father and mother be ransomed for you, O Messenger of God—what do mine eyes see?"

He said, "The first one was God—the Mighty and Glorious—granting you victory over Yemen. The second one was God granting you victory over Syria and North Africa. The third one was God granting you victory over the East. So rejoice, O Muslims,

in that!"
They said, "Praise be to God; it is a true promise."
And when the allied clans heard of this, the believers said, "This is what God and His Messenger have promised us, and God and His Messenger speak the truth." However, the hypocrites said, "Are you not amazed at what he is doing? He is making false promises to you and telling you that he—in Medina—he can see the castles of al-Ḥīrah [in Mesopotamia] and al-Madāʾin, ruled by the Persian king, and that you will conquer them, while you are digging a trench around yourselves and are too afraid to use the lavatory!"
Majmaʿ al-Bayān continues to relate another of the signs of the prophethood that occurred when they were digging the trench. This is related from Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥāfiẓ with a chain of narration from ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Ayman al-Makhzūmī. He says that he heard Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh say:
On the Day of the Trench, we were digging the trench and struck solid rock. So we said, "O Messenger of God! We have struck rock."
The Messenger of God, "Sprinkle water on it." Then he stood and went there, while a rock was bound to his stomach due to hunger. He picked up a pick-axe or spade, said "in the name of God" three times, then wielded a mighty blow, and it shattered to sand.
I said, "O Messenger of God, would you give me permission to go home?" He did, and I asked my wife, "Do you have anything [to eat]?"
She said, "I have some barley and a she-goat." So she ground the barley and made it into bread, and I slaughtered the goat and skinned it. Then I left it to my wife, went to the Messenger of God, and sat with him for a while, then said, "Allow me to go, O Messenger of God." He did. When I came home to my wife, the dough and meat were ready.
So I returned to the Messenger of God and said, "O Messenger of God, we have some food. Why don't you and a couple of your companions come over?"
He said, "How much [food]?"
I said, "A measure (*sāʿ*) of barley, and a goat."

So he told all the Muslims, "Come to Jābir's house!" and they got up.

I remained, ashamed in a way that only God knows. I said, "He invited all those people for one measure of barley and one goat."

I went to my wife and told her how embarrassed I was that the Messenger of God was going to bring all these people home.

She said, "Did he ask you how many people you had food for?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "God and His Messenger know best. We have told him what we have." At that, my sorrow lifted.

The Messenger of God came and said, "Let me have the meat."

The Messenger of God began to shred the meat and make it into a stew with pieces of bread; then he heated both the bread and meat. The people kept coming until everyone was satiated; whenever he returned to the oven and pot, they were full.

Then the Messenger of God said, "Eat, and serve your food." And we continued eating it and serving it to all of the people.

Al-Bukhārī also relates this in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.[1]

Majmaʿ al-Bayān continues:

When the Messenger of God had finished the trench, the Quraysh came and encamped between al-Juruf and al-Ghābah. They had ten thousand forces, of varying tribes, including the Banū Kinānah and the people of Tihāmah. Then the Ghaṭfān tribe came with followers from Najd, and they all camped near Mound Uḥud. Then the Messenger of God and three thousand Muslims came out. With their backs to Salʿ, they pitched camp, with the trench between it and the people [the enemy]. He then ordered that the women and children be taken to fortifications.

The enemy of God, Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab al-Naḍīrī, came forth and went to Kaʿb ibn Asad al-Qaraẓī, a representative of the Banū Qurayẓah. On behalf of his people, Kaʿb had made a pact with the Messenger of God. When Kaʿb heard Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab's voice, he locked him out of the fortress. Ḥuyay asked to be let in, but Kaʿb refused. Ḥuyay shouted, "Kaʿb, open up!"

1 The comment about Bukhārī is part of the text of *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*. There are some slight variations in the narration in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (vol. 64, ch. 29), but the overall content is the same. (Trans.)

Kaʿb said, "Woe be upon you, Ḥuyay! You are a man who brings ill fate! I have sworn to Muḥammad [that I will not do this], and I am not going to break the agreement between me and him, while I have never seen anything but loyalty and honesty on his side."
Ḥuyay said, "Woe be upon you; open up so that I can speak to you!"
Kaʿb said, "I am not going to do that."
Ḥuyay said, "You have only shut me out because of your date-and-barley stew; you don't want me to eat any with you!"
Irritated, Kaʿb let Ḥuyay in. Ḥuyay said, "Woe be upon you, Kaʿb! I have brought you everlasting might and an overflowing sea. I have brought you the Quraysh with their chiefs and leaders, and the Ghaṭfān with their chiefs and leaders. They have sworn to me that they shall not leave until they have rooted out Muḥammad and everyone with him."
Kaʿb said, "By God, you have brought me everlasting humiliation—a cloud that has already shed its rain and let loose its lightning bolts, and has nothing left. Leave me and Muḥammad to continue as we are, for I have always known Muḥammad to be loyal and truthful."
Ḥuyay ibn Kaʿb kept twisting his arm until Kaʿb yielded to him. Ḥuyay swore to Kaʿb that if the Quraysh and Ghaṭfān retreated, and they had not yet struck Muḥammad, that he would stand with Kaʿb in his fortress until whatever befell Kaʿb befell him. So Kaʿb broke his agreement with the Prophet.
When news of this reached the Messenger of God, he sent Saʿd ibn Muʿādh ibn al-Nuʿman ibn Imruʾ al-Qays (one of Banū ʿAbd al-Ashhal, who was, at that time, the chief of the Aws) and Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah (one of the [Banū] Sāʿadah ibn Kaʿb ibn al-Khazraj, who was, at that time, the chief of the Khazraj). With them was ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah and Khawwāt ibn Jubayr. He said, "Go and see whether or not this news is true. If it is true, convey it to us in an oblique way that we will understand but that other people will not. And if Kaʿb remains loyal, then announce it to the people."
So they went there and found that things were even worse than what they had heard. They claimed there was no treaty between

themselves and the Prophet. Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah reviled them, and they reviled him; then Saʿd ibn Maʿadh said, "Cut it out, for what has transpired between us and them is too serious for flinging insults." Then they went to the Messenger of God and told him, "ʿAḍal and al-Qārah!" This alluded to how ʿAḍal and al-Qārah had betrayed the companions of the Messenger of God (namely, Khubayb ibn ʿAdī and his men, who were killed during the Expedition of al-Rajīʿ).

The Messenger of God replied, "God is great! Rejoice, O Muslims!" Their difficulties intensified. Fear struck, and their enemies came at them from above and below, until the believers lost hope, and hypocrisy broke out among some of the hypocrites. So the Messenger of God stood firm, and some of the polytheists stood firm against him. Twenty nights passed without any fighting apart from some arrows that were shot—except that some horsemen from the Quraysh—including ʿAmr ibn ʿAbd Wadd (a member of Banū ʿĀmir ibn Luway), ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl, Ḍirār ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Hubayrah ibn Abī Wahab, and Nawfal ibn ʿAbd Allah—had readied themselves for battle and rode out on their horses until they reached the camps of the Banū Kinānah and said, "Prepare to fight, O Banū Kinānah! Today, you shall learn who the true horsemen are!" Then they surrounded them on their horses and pressed forward until they halted at the trench, and said, "By God, the Arabs have never used such a stratagem before." Then they headed for a narrow section of the trench and struck their horses, so that they rushed towards it and landed on the marshy ground between the trench and Salʿ.

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib came forth with some Muslims and blocked the gap that they had broken through, and the horsemen approached them. ʿAmr ibn ʿAbd Wadd was one of the horsemen of the Quraysh, and he had fought at the Battle of Badr until he was stricken by wounds, and had therefore been absent from the Battle of Uhud. Therefore, at the Battle of the Trench, he went out bearing a mark so that he would be seen. He was seen as the equivalent to a thousand horsemen and was known as the "Horseman of Yalayl" (Yalayl being the name of a wadi near Badr), because he had ridden forth with the Quraysh towards

Yalayl, where they had found the Banū Bakr en masse. He had told his men, "Turn back," and they turned back, while he stood face-to-face against Banū Bakr and stopped them from reaching their goal. So he became famous for that. The area where the trench had been dug was called al-Madhād. ʿAmr was the first of his men to jump across it, followed by the others. Thus it is said that ʿAmr was the first horseman to cross al-Madhād, and that he was the Horseman of Yalayl.

Majmaʿ al-Bayān continues that Ibn Isḥāq says:

ʿAmr ibn ʿAbd Wadd was shouting, "Who will come out to fight?"

ʿAlī stood, his face hidden by his armor, and said, "I will, O Prophet of God."

The Prophet told him, "It is ʿAmr; sit down."

ʿAmr yelled, "Do you have no men?" He kept goading them, booming out, "Where is your paradise that you swear that the slain will enter?"

ʿAlī stood again and said, "I will fight him, O Messenger of God."

ʿAmr called out to them a third time—and this time, he shouted some poetry composed on the spur of the moment:

My voice has grown hoarse from shouting. Do you have none who will fight?
I wait while the brave tremble! I am ready to be a brave warrior;
Nobility and courage are the best traits of a warrior.

ʿAlī stood and said, "O Messenger of God, I will fight him!"

The Prophet said, "It is ʿAmr."

ʿAli said, "Even if it is ʿAmr."

So the Messenger of God gave him permission to fight.

Ibn Isḥāq says:

ʿAlī approached ʿAmr, reciting his own battle-poems:

Don't rush—no weakling has come to answer you.
Your challenger is firm in intent and insight. Truth is ever-victorious!
I hope to strike you with a blow that shall make the mourners lament

And that shall be ever-remembered.
ʿAmr asked him, "Who are you?"
He said, "I am ʿAlī."
ʿAmr asked, "The son of ʿAbd Manāf?"
He said, "I am ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim ibn ʿAbd Manāf."
He said, "Anyone beside you O son of my brother, who was one of your paternal uncles and who is elder than you ! Let me fight someone else, for I dislike shedding your blood."
ʿAlī said, "But, by God, I do not dislike shedding your blood."
Angered, ʿAmr dismounted and drew his sword, as if it were a firebrand. Then he stormed towards ʿAlī, and ʿAlī blocked him with his shield. ʿAmr struck the shield and split it down the front. His sword lodged into it and his head was struck. So ʿAli struck his neck, and he fell.
The narration of Ḥudhayfah says:
ʿAlī struck ʿAmr's legs with his sword. ʿAmr fell onto his back, and dust billowed around them [so no one could see who was victorious]. Then ʿAlī's voice rang out. "God is great!"
The Messenger of God said, "By the One in whose hand is my soul, he has slain him."
The first person to rush into the dust-cloud was ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He said, "O Messenger of God, he killed him and struck his head!"
ʿAlī came to the Messenger of God jubilantly.
Ḥudhayfah continues:
The Prophet said, "Rejoice, O ʿAlī! Were this deed of yours today weighed against all the deeds of the *ummah* of Muḥammad, yours would outweigh them! For all the houses of the polytheists shall be filled with weakness and lament, and all the houses of the Muslims shall be filled with honour due to your killing of ʿAmr."
Majmaʿ al-Bayān continues that it is related from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd:[1]
He used to recite: "*Allah spared the faithful of fighting* through

1 This is related from al-Ḥākim from Abū al-Qāsim (also with a chain of narration from Sufyān al-Thawrī) from Zubayd al-Thāni from Murrah from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd.

ʿAlī (33:25)."
Retreating, ʿAmr's men spurred their horses over the trench, and the Muslims followed suit. They found Nawfal ibn ʿAbd al-ʿUzzah inside the trench and began pelting him with stones.
He told them, "Fighting is better than this. Someone come down for me to fight!" So al-Zubayr ibn al-ʿAwwām killed him.
Ibn Isḥāq reports:
ʿAlī had stabbed him in the collarbone so hard that the spear went straight through, and he died in the trench.
The polytheists sent a message to the Prophet offering to pay ten thousand for the body.
The Prophet replied, "You can have him; we do not profit off the dead."
ʿAli then recited some verses, including:

He foolishly fought for what is hewn of stone, but I rightly fought for the Lord of Muḥammad.
So I struck him and left him like a dried date-stump.
I stayed my hand from the spoils of war and closed my eyes to that,
Though I knew that if he had struck me, he would have taken all that I had.

Ibn Isḥāq says:
Ḥanān ibn Qays ibn al-ʿArafah shot arrows at Saʿd ibn Muʿādh, calling out, "Take this, for I am Ibn al-ʿArafah!"
He struck Saʿd in his heels. Saʿd said, "May God make your face known in the Fire![1] O God, if You let anyone survive this war with the Quraysh, let me live, for there is no one else I would rather fight than these people who distressed the Messenger of God, and denied him, and expelled him. And if You spark war between us and them, then make me a martyr, and do not take my life until my eyes find comfort in what happens to the Banū Qurayẓah."
He continues:
Nuʿaym ibn Masʿūd al-Ashjaʿī came to the Prophet and said,

1 This is a play on words, since ʿ*arafa* means "to know". (Trans.)

"O Messenger of God! I have accepted Islam, but none of my tribespeople know this. Command me as you wish."
The Prophet told him, "You are only one man among us. Make them abandon [each other] so that they leave us, as much as you can, for war is deception."
So Nuʿaym ibn Masʿūd went to the Banū Qurayẓah and told them, "I am your friend. By God, you are not in the same position as the Quraysh and the Ghaṭfān, since this land is your land, and upon it are your property, your children, and your women. The Quraysh and Ghaṭfān live elsewhere and came to settle with you. If they see an opportunity, they will take it; if not, they will go back from whence they came. They will leave you on your own, and you will be too weak [to defend yourselves]. So do not fight until you take some of their noblemen as hostages as a guarantee that they will not desert you until they have executed Muḥammad."
They replied, "You said what we were thinking."
Then he left and went to Abū Sufyān and the chieftains of the Quraysh. He said, "O Quraysh! You know my love for you and how I have distanced myself from Muḥammad and his religion. I have come to you with counsel, so keep it secret."
They said, "We shall do that; we have no suspicion of you."
He said, "You know that the Banū Qurayẓah regret what they did to Muḥammad. They sent him a message saying, 'You shall not be pleased with us unless we take a group of their noblemen from their tribes as hostages and hand them over to you. You can slit their throats, and then we will stand with you until we expel them from your land.' He said yes, so do not hand over to them a single one of your men, and watch out."
Then he went to the Ghaṭfān and said, "O Ghaṭfān! I am one of you." Then he told them the same thing he had told the Quraysh.
This was the night of the Sabbath in the month of Shawwāl in the fifth year after the *hijrah*. The next morning, when Abū Sufyān rose, he sent them ʿIkrimah ibn Abī Jahl along with a contingent of the Quraysh to tell them, "O Jews! Abū Sufyān wishes to tell you that our camels and sheep have perished. We cannot stay where we are. Come out to fight Muḥammad so we can finish him off!"

They replied, "Today is the Sabbath, and we do not do any work on the Sabbath. Furthermore, we will not fight with you unless you hand over to us some of your men as a guarantee that you will not abandon us until we have finished of Muḥammad."
Abū Sufyān said, "By God! Nuʿaym warned us about that." So Abū Sufyān sent them another message: "We will not give you a single men. If you want, come out and fight; and if you want, stay away."
The Jews said, "By God, this is what Nuʿaym told us." Then they sent in reply: "By God, we shall not fight until you give us some hostages as a guarantee."
Thus God sowed division between them. Then, at night, God beset them with freezing, wintry winds that were so bitterly cold that they turned back.
Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb says that Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān recalled: By God, on the Day of the Trench, you would have seen how we suffered from exhaustion and hunger and fear. No one knows how intense it was save God.
One night, the Messenger of God stood and prayed, as much as God willed, then asked us, "Is there any man who will go and bring us news of the enemy? God will make such a man my neighbor in paradise."
By God, not a single one of us stood up—we were so terrified and exhausted and hungry.
When no one came forward, he called me, and I could not find any way out, so I said, "At your service."
He said, "Go, and bring news of the enemy, and don't let anything happen until you come back."
So I went to the enemy. The wind and God's hosts[1] had done what they had done—neither a tent nor a fire nor a cooking-pot had stayed put.
All of a sudden, Abū Sufyān came out of his tent and said, "O Quraysh! All of you, check the person you are sitting next to."
I turned to the person on my right and asked, "Who are you?"
He said, "I am so-and-so."
Then Abū Sufyān went back to his campsite and said, "O Quraysh!

1 Probably the angels; a reference to, *and We sent against them a gale and hosts whom you did not see* (33:9). (Trans.)

By God, you cannot stay here. The camels and sheep have died, and Banū Qurayẓah have broken their vow, and this wind does not leave anything standing." Then he leaped onto his riding-animal before he had even untied it.

I thought, "I can shoot an arrow at this enemy of God and kill him now." I strung my bow and placed an arrow in it and was about to fire it, when I remembered that the Messenger of God had told me not to let anything happen until I came back.

So I lowered the bow and then returned to the Messenger of God. He was praying; when he heard me, he sat me at his feet and covered me with his woolen wrapper while he was bowing and prostrating. Then he asked, "What news do you bring?"

So I told him.

It is related from Sulaymān ibn Ṣard:

After the Messenger of God ousted the confederates (*aḥzāb*), he said, "Now we will attack them, but they will not attack us." It was as he said. The Quraysh never attacked after that, but he continued skirmishes with them until God made him victorious over Mecca.

Author's comments: This is what al-Ṭabrisī related in *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*. We have mentioned but an abridged version of it. *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says something similar, as does *al-Durr al-Manthūr* and other assorted narrations.

(2) *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* also relates from al-Zuhrī from ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Kaᶜb ibn Mālik that his father said:

When the Prophet returned from the Battle of the Trench, he shed his battle-gear and was bathing when Jibrīl came to him and said, "You have excused yourself from fighting. Do I not see that you have set aside your battle-gear, but we have not set aside ours?"

The Messenger of God leapt up in surprise and swore to the people that they would not pray the afternoon prayer until they reached the Banū Qurayẓah. So the people armed themselves, but they did not reach the Banū Qurayẓah until the sun had set. The people disagreed. Some said that the Messenger of God had sworn that they would not pray the afternoon prayer until they had reached the Banū Qurayẓah and held fast to that vow, on the grounds that they would bear no sin. So some prayed the afternoon prayer, and others did not until the sun had set; then, they prayed it when they had reached Banū Qurayẓah. The

Messenger of God did not criticize either side.
ʿUrwah recalls:
The Messenger of God sent ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib ahead and gave him the banner. He ordered him to march forward until he had brought the army to the fortress of the Banū Qurayẓah.
He did that, and the Messenger of God followed them. On his way, he came across some of the Helpers (Anṣār) who were from the Banū Ghanam tribe. They were waiting for the Messenger of God and thought that a horseman had gone by. They said, "Daḥiya al-Kalbī passed us atop a white mule with marigold brocade."
The Messenger of God said, "That was not Daḥiya. That was Jibrāʾīl, sent to shake the Banū Qurayẓah and strike fear into their hearts."
ʿAlī went on until he neared the fortress and heard some foul words being said about the Messenger of God. So he went back to the Messenger of God and said, "O Messenger of God, it is better if you do not come near these wicked people."
He said, "I think that perhaps they said something insulting about me?"
ʿAlī said, "Yes, O Messenger of God."
He said, "If they had seen me, they would not have said anything like that."
When the Messenger of God approached their fortresses, he called out, "O brethren of apes and swine! Did not God humiliate you and send down His retribution upon you?"
They said, "O Abū al-Qāsim, you have never been ignorant or impetuous."
So the Messenger of God besieged them for 25 nights until they wearied under the siege, and God struck fear into their hearts. Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab had entered the fortress of the Banū Qurayẓah when the Quraysh and Ghaṭfān had withdrawn. When they were certain that the Messenger of God would not back down until he had obliterated them, Kaʿb ibn Asad said, "O Jews! You see what has befallen you. I will propose three options, so choose whatever you wish."
They said, "What are they?"
He said, "You can pay allegiance to this man and believe in him. For, by God, it has become clear to you that he is a prophet sent by God, and that he is the one you find mentioned in your Book.

So save your lives and your property and your children."
They said, "We will never abandon the law of the Torah or exchange it for anything else."
He said, "If you refuse this, then let us kill our children and women, then go out to fight Muḥammad as men with swords, not leaving behind any burden to weigh on our minds, until God judges between us and Muḥammad. If we perish, we perish, and we will not have left behind any of our descendants to worry us. And if we are victorious, then we will find other women and children."
They said, "We should kill these poor people? There would be no good in living after them!"
He said, "If you refuse this, then tonight is the night of the Sabbath. Perhaps Muḥammad and his men feel secure. So head down to them; perhaps we may take them by surprise."
They said, "We should violate our Sabbath? And we should do what those who came before us did? You know what they were turned into! [That is, they were turned into apes and swine.]"
He said, "From the day his mother bore him, not a single man among you has shown good judgment."
Al-Zuhrī says:
When they asked the Messenger of God to appoint a man to pass judgment over them, he said "Choose whichever of my companions that you will." They selected Saʿd ibn Muʿādh, and the Prophet was pleased with that. Thus they fell under the jurisdiction of Saʿd ibn Muʿādh.
The Prophet confiscated their weapons and put them in his tent, then ordered that they be tied and kept in the house of Usāmah. After that, the Messenger of God sent for Saʿd ibn Muʿādh. He was brought to him, and he decreed that those who had fought them should be killed, their women and children should be taken captive, their wealth should be divided as booty, and that their dwellings should pass into the hands of the Emigrants, not the Helpers. He told the Helpers, "You have homes, but they do not."
The Messenger of God said, "God is great!" Then he told Saʿd, "You have judged between them according to the rule of God, the Mighty and Glorious."
[Al-Zuhrī notes]:
In some narrations, it says, "You have judged between them

according to the rule of God, from above the seven heavens (*arqiʿah*)," and *arqiʿah* is the plural of *raqīʿ*, meaning the sky of this world.

The narration resumes:

So the Messenger of God killed the fighters. Some say there were 600 fighters. Some say that 450 men were executed and 750 were taken captive.

It is also narrated that when they were being brought to the Messenger of God, they said to Kaʿb ibn Asad, "O Kaʿb! What do you think he will do with us?"

Kaʿb said, "Do you ask this everywhere? Do you not see that the summoner never discharges anyone, and that those of you who are taken away do not come back? By God, you will be killed."

Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab, the enemy of God, was brought. He was wearing a garment with little holes in it: he had poked his garment with his fingertips everywhere so that it would not be taken from him, and his hands were bound to his neck with a rope. When the Messenger of God saw him, he said, "By God, I do not blame myself for being hostile to you; however, whomever God forsakes is forsaken."

Then he said, "O people! There is no ill in God's command. It was the decree of God; it was decreed that the Israelites be slain." Then he was seated and beheaded.

Then the Messenger of God divided up his women, children, and property among the Muslims. He sent some of the captives to Najd with Saʿd ibn Zayd al-Anṣārī, who traded them for horses and weapons.

It is related:

When the matter with Banū Qurayẓah finished, a wound that Saʿd ibn Muʿādh had gushed forth, and so the Messenger of God sent him back to a tent that he had pitched for him in the mosque.

It is related from Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh:

Jibrāʾīl came to the Messenger of God and said, "Because of this righteous servant who has died, the gates of the heavens have been opened for him, and the Throne has trembled on his account." So the Messenger of God went out and saw that Saʿd ibn Muʿādh had died.

Author's comments: This story has also been narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* in a more detailed form. For instance, it says that Kaʿb ibn Asad

came out with his hands bound to his neck, and when the Messenger of God saw him, he said, "O Kaʿb! Did you not benefit from the advice of Ibn al-Hawās, the wise rabbi who came to you in Syria? The one who said, 'I abandoned wine and the intoxicants in exchange for poverty and dates for the sake of a prophet who will arise in Mecca and who will come to this sea. He will suffice with some grain and dates and ride a bare donkey. There will be a redness in his eyes, and between his shoulders will be the mark of prophethood. He will place his sword upon his neck, and will not care which of you he meets. His rule shall extend to [*muqati' al-khaff wa al-hafir*.]'"

Kaʿb said, "And that was what happened, O Muḥammad. Were it not for the blame of the Jews, I would have granted you safety and believed in you. However, I shall live and die upon the Jewish religion."

The Messenger of God said "Bring him forward and strike his neck." This was done.

It also says that the Messenger of God fought them night and day during both battles at Badr night and day for three days. He used to say, "Give them clean water, and feed them well, and be good to their captives," until all of them were killed. So God, the Might and Glorious, revealed to him: *And He dragged down those who had backed them from among the People of the Book from their strongholds, and He cast terror into their hearts, you killed a part of them, and took captive part of them. And He bequeathed you their land, their houses and their possessions, and a territory you had not trodden, and Allah has power over all things* (33:26–27).

(3) *In Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related from Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥaskāni from ʿAmr ibn Thābit from Abū Isḥāq that ʿAlī said:
Men who fulfil what they have pledged to Allah (33:23) was revealed about us. We, by God, are waiting and *have not changed in the least* (33:23).

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Verses 28-35

These verses are about the wives of the Prophet. They first (a) command the Prophet to tell them that they are not to enjoy worldly adornments and instead must enjoy restraint and abstemiousness, if they choose to remain married to the Prophet. Then, they speak directly to the wives and tell them (b) their esteem and standing makes their position difficult. If they revere God, they will be gifted a double reward, but if they commit a flagrant indecency, they shall endure a double punishment. The verses then (c) enjoin them to be virtuous and to remain in their homes rather than parading themselves about, and to pray, give charity, and call to mind the verses and wisdom which is recited in their homes. Then the verses (d) promise all goodly man and women forgiveness and a great reward.

Commentary

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِأَزْوَاجِكَ إِنْ كُنْتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا
فَتَعَالَيْنَ أُمَتِّعْكُنَّ وَأُسَرِّحْكُنَّ سَرَاحًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٢٨﴾ وَإِنْ كُنْتُنَّ تُرِدْنَ اللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُ وَالدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ أَعَدَّ لِلْمُحْسِنَاتِ مِنْكُنَّ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

(33:28-29) ***O Prophet! Say to your wives, If you desire the life of this world and its ornaments, then come; I shall provide for you and release you fairly. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the hereafter—Allah has prepared a great reward for the virtuous among you.***

These verses indicate that the wives of the Prophet, or at least some of them, were unhappy with their standard of living in the Prophet's house. They were enduring poverty and need, and so they complained about that to him. These verses submit that they can actually enjoy a better standard of living and the joys that the world has to offer. Therefore, God commands his Prophet to give them a choice: either they can leave him and have what they want, or remain with him in their current circumstances.

The way that these verses are phrased shows that there are two

possibilities. Either they long for the life of this world and its adornments, or else they long for God, His messenger, and the hereafter. They cannot have both—that is, they cannot enjoy luxury and finery and amusement while being married to the Prophet and living in his house. Furthermore, these two choices are opposites; they can only have one through rejecting the other. "Desiring the worldly life and its adornments" means setting their hearts staunchly on that priority, whether or not they also desire the afterlife. Similarly, "desiring the hereafter" means setting their hearts on the afterlife—regardless of whether they, in practice, enjoy some of the goodness of this world and a more comfortable life, or not.

Thus, they can choose, and each choice comes with its own reward. However, they must choose one or the other; they cannot choose both. They can choose the worldly life and its beguilements. For this, they must divorce the Prophet, and he will gift them each a sum of wealth. Otherwise, they can choose to remain married to the Prophet and choose the hereafter over the worldly life and its beguilements. In exchange, they will receive a great reward from God. However, this is not automatically awarded to them; rather, it is on the condition that they act righteously and virtuously.

This makes it clear that simply being married to the Prophet is not enough to grant them honour before God. Rather, being married to the Prophet becomes an honour if and only if they act righteously and revere God. For that reason, when the verses speak again about their high status, they make it contingent on their reverence: *O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you be reverent…* (33:32).

This is similar to how the Qur'an speaks about the Prophet and his companions:

Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves; you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure; their marks are in their faces because of the effect of prostration… Allah has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those among them who believe and do good. (48:29)

That is, it praises them all for their outward good deeds but makes the *great reward* contingent on both faith and righteous actions.

In short, honour is not contingent on any other thing, such as nobility or ancestry, as is expressed in the verse *the most honourable of you [all*

people] is the most reverent towards Allah (49:10).

O Prophet! Say to your wives…: This verse commands the Prophet to tell these to verses to his wives. They oblige him to divorce them and grant them a settlement of wealth if they choose this. Conversely, they may remain married to him if they choose God, His Messenger, and the eternal abode.

If you desire the life of this world and its ornaments…: "Desiring the life of this world and its ornaments" is a figure of speech indicating one of the two opposing choices. It conveys that their hearts cling to the worldly life, and hence turn away from the hereafter.

Come* (taʿālayna)*; I shall provide for you* (umattiʿkunna) *and release you* (usarriḥkunna sarāḥan jamīlan) *fairly: *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* says:

> The verb *taʿāl* ("come") originally was used when a person at a higher level called down to a person at a lower level to tell that person to come up. Eventually, it began to be used for people regardless of their elevation [that is, to mean "come here" not "come up"]. *Taʿālayna* in this verse means "present your choice", and is not literally telling them to physically move towards the Prophet or to ascend something. This is similar to the expressions "he approached me with a conflict" (*aqbala yukhāṣimanī*), "he went to speak to me (*dhahaba yukallimanī*)", and "he began to threaten me (*qāma yuhaddidunī*)".[1]

Umattiʿkunna means giving them a sum of money or wealth upon divorce. *Usarriḥkunna* means "divorce", and *sarāḥan jamīlan* means to separate amicably without fighting or ill-feelings between the ex-spouses.

Some exegetes hold that these verses are applicable to the study of Islamic law (*fiqh*). However, the truth of the matter is that the rulings in these verses only apply to the Prophet, and there is no textual evidence in the verses indicating that they apply to anyone else. Further discussion on this matter can be found in books of *fiqh*.

And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the hereafter—Allah has prepared a great reward for the virtuous* (muḥsināt) *among you: As discussed above, this clause offers a wholly opposite choice from the first choice. It means: "If you wish and choose to obey God and His

1 In all of these expressions, the verb is not taken literally to involve motion but rather is understood as a figure of speech. Similar expressions in English include the casual use of the phrases "come on" or "come off it". (Trans.)

Messenger, and yearn for happiness in the eternal abode while patiently enduring your constricted standard of living and deprivation from the glitter of worldly goods." This clause implies that they choose to remain married to the Prophet and to patiently endure their constricted standard of living. Otherwise, it would not be correct to associate virtuousness or good-doing (*for the virtuous among you*) with the promised reward; this is clear.

It means: "If you wish and choose to remain married to the Prophet and to patiently endure a constricted standard of living, then God has prepared a great reward for you—on the condition that you act goodly and virtuously, in addition to yearning for God, His Messenger, and the eternal abode. If you are not righteous, you will only lose out on this world and the hereafter."

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ مَنْ يَأْتِ مِنْكُنَّ بِفَاحِشَةٍ مُبَيِّنَةٍ يُضَاعَفْ لَهَا الْعَذَابُ ضِعْفَيْنِ ۚ وَكَانَ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرًا ﴿٣٠﴾

(33:30) ***O wives of the Prophet! If any of you commits a flagrant indecency, her punishment shall be doubled, and this is easy for Allah.***

This verse shifts from speaking to the Prophet about his wives to addressing his wives directly in order to outline their responsibilities and for emphasis. This and the next verse clarify specifically what is meant by *Allah has prepared a great reward for the virtuous among you*, both with respect to what they must and mustn't do.

If any of you commits a flagrant indecency* (fāḥishatin mubayyinatin)*: *Fāḥishah* ("indecency") bespeaks of an unsightly, ugly, atrocious, grave act, such as harming, defaming, or slandering the Prophet. *Mubayyinah* means "clear" or "obvious".

Her punishment shall be doubled* (ḍiʿfayn)*: *Doubled* means two of the same thing; this understanding is reinforced by the phrasing in the next verse—*We shall reward her twice* [*marratayn*, or two times]. Therefore, pay no heed to those exegetes who say that *doubled* means burning longer in or closer to the flames of hell, or that altogether they shall receive a threefold share of punishment.

And this is easy for Allah: The verse wraps up with this to show that the honour or status accrued by being married to the Prophet does not

interfere with God's ability to punish them in the slightest, for the only true honour arises from reverence (*taqwā*). Being married to the Prophet can lead to a beautiful outcome, if it is paired with reverence. However, if it is paired with sinfulness, it will spawn nothing but desolation and misery.

وَمَنْ يَقْنُتْ مِنْكُنَّ لِلَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا نُؤْتِهَا أَجْرَهَا مَرَّتَيْنِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهَا رِزْقًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٣١﴾

(33:31) ***And if any of you obeys* (yaqnut) *Allah and His messenger and works righteous deeds, We shall reward her twice, and We have prepared* (aʿtadnā) *for her a generous provision* (rizqan karīman).**

The verb *yaqnut* means "being submissive"; some say it means "being obedient" or "being submissive and obedient". The verb *aʿtadnā* means "prepare" or "make ready". *A generous provision* here is a metaphor for Paradise.

It means: "Whoever among you submits to and obeys God and His Messenger and acts righteously shall be granted twice the reward and a generous provision—meaning a place in the garden."

The previous verse ended in the third person [*this is easy for Allah*]. Here, the verse shifts to the first person plural [*We shall reward, We have prepared*] to convey a sense of nearness and honour, in contrast to the sense of desolation and misery understood from *her punishment shall be doubled*.

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ ۚ إِنِ اتَّقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا ﴿٣٢﴾ وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ ۖ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

(33:32-33) ***O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you be reverent, then be not soft in your speech, lest a man with a diseased heart desire [you]; and speak in a plain and ordinary manner. And stay in your houses, and do not flaunt your***

charms as was done in the first Age of Ignorance. And establish the prayer and give charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully.

These verses establish that the wives of the Prophet are not the same as other women. If they fear God, they will have a higher status than other women. Then they outline specific commands and prohibitions due to them because they are married to the Prophet; these are introduced with the grammatical conjunction *fa-* and include refraining from speaking alluringly, staying at home, and not putting themselves on display. These traits are equally desirable for other women, not just the wives of the Prophet.

By prefacing the verse with *you are not like any other women*, the verse emphasized that these commands and prohibitions are particularly vital for them, even if they are also applicable to other women. It is as if it is saying: "Since you are not like other women, it is absolutely incumbent upon you to meet these expectations and to keep to the boundaries of the religion of God, even more so than other women." This is further emphasized by the threat of double punishment and the promise of double reward [for each of them], depending on whether they [individually] act rightly or wrongly; this is in keeping with the emphasis on the obligations put upon them here.

Be not soft in your speech, lest a man with a diseased heart desire [you]: The first part of the verse established their unique position as wives of the Prophet. It conditionally offered them a lofty status if they are reverent towards and mindful of God. This section reiterates that this status arises only from reverence towards and mindfulness of God (*taqwā*) and cannot be accrued solely through their link to the Prophet. It forbids them from being soft in speech. This means that they should not speak pleasantly and softly with men in a way that might attract suspicion or inflame the passions of a man with a sick heart. This [disease of the heart] is the absence of the faculty of faith, which dissuades a person from inclining towards unsightly deeds.

***Speak in a plain and ordinary manner* (qawlan maʿrūfan):** This means to speak in a normal, straightforward way—neither melodiously nor suggestively, neither hinting at any impropriety nor kindling suspicion. They should speak in a way endorsed by Islamic law (shariah) and Islamic

custom (ʿ*urf*)

And stay* (qarna) *in your homes, and do not flaunt your charms as was done in the first Age of Ignorance* (wa lā tabarrajnā tabarruj al-jāhiliyat al-ūlā)*: If the imperative *qarna* is from the verb *qarra*, *yaqirru* ("to be settled in", "to reside in"), the imperative form *qarna* is a shortened form of the imperative *iqrirna* ("stay in", "remain in") with one of the *r*'s dropped. Alternatively, it could be from the verb *qāra*, *yuqāru* ("to gather", to "join", "to muster") and be a figure of speech meaning "stay affixed to your homes".[1]

Tabarruj means to flaunt or display one's self before the people, just as the related word *burj* ("tower", "castle", "constellation", "sign of the zodiac") also describes something visible to an onlooker.

The first Age of Ignorance (al-jāhiliyyah al-ūlā) refers to the time before the Prophet received the first revelation of the Qur'an. By it is meant the customs of the ancients. Exegetes have put forward other views; namely that it refers to (a) the 800 years which elapsed between Adam and Noah, (b) the time between Idrīs and Noah, (c) the era of David and Solomon, (d) the era of Abraham's birth, and (e) the centuries between Jesus and Muḥammad, in which there was a gap between prophets. However, there is no evidence for any of these views.

And establish the prayer and give charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger: This section commands them to fulfil their religious obligations. Prayer and charity have been singled out because prayer is a foundational act of worship (ʿ*ibādāt*) and charity is a foundational act of social interchange (*muʿāmalāt*). Then, all religious duties are included in the expression *and obey Allah and His messenger*. "Obeying God" means fulfilling their religious duties and obeying His messenger in what he commands and forbids, as per the authority granted to the Prophet in the verse: *The Prophet is more entitled to the faithful than their own souls* (33:6).

Allah wills* (innamā yurīdu) *to remove any impurity from you* (ʿankum)*, O People of the House* (Ahl al-Bayt)*, and purify you fully: The grammatical particle *innamā* [which introduces this sentence] restricts the meaning of this sentence in two ways. First, it restricts God's will [in this sentence] to "removing impurity" and "purification". Second, it restricts these acts to the *People of the House*, who are addressed and specified by

1 A similarly styled English expression would be "to hold down the fort". (Trans.)

the second person plural pronoun *from you* (ʿankum). This is regardless of whether the phrase Ahl al-Bayt is understood as a specifier [that is, indicating that this sentence applies only to the *People of the House* and no one else], as an honorific [praising them], or as a vocative [addressing the *People of the House* directly].

People of the House does not refer specifically to the wives of the Prophet, because the *People of the House* are addressed by the pronoun ʿ*ankum* ("you", second person plural, including both men and women) as opposed to the pronoun ʿ*ankunna* ("you", second person plural, feminine only). Either these words are addressed to the wives of the Prophet in addition to other people, or else they are addressed to a different group of people. [In either case, the group must include one or more males.]

Views which the Author Rejects:[1]

Part 1:

Some possibilities for the meaning of *People of the House* (Ahl al-Bayt) include:

(1) *People of the House* refers to the people of the Sacred House [*al-bayt al-ḥarām*, the Kaʿbah]. This is because they are spoken of as *the pious* in the verse: *Its [the Sacred House's] guardians are only the pious* (8:34). [And this section of the sūrah also emphasizes piety.]

(2) It refers to the people of the Prophet's Mosque.

(3) It refers to the Prophet's household. Here, "household" would include whoever would be commonly understood (through ʿ*urf*) as members a household, including wives and kin. The Prophet's kin would be the family of ʿAbbās, the family of ʿAqīl, the family of Jaʿfar, and the family of ʿAlī.

(4) It refers to the Prophet and his wives. Perhaps this interpretation is what is meant in a narration ascribed to ʿIkrimah and ʿUrwah which says that this sentence refers specifically to the wives of the Prophet.

(5) It refers to others entirely, not involving the wives at all. For instance, it could refer to the kin of the Prophet; namely, the family of ʿAbbās, the family of ʿAqīl, the family of Jaʿfar, and the family of ʿAlī.

1 Headers in this section added by translator for ease of reading. (Pub.)

(6) In any case, [it seems that] the intent [or one of the intents] behind "removing impurity" and "purifying" is "being mindful, pious, and cautious in religion" (*taqwā dīnī*) through abstaining from what is forbidden and doing what is required. Therefore, it means that God Himself does not benefit from carrying out religious responsibilities; rather, God wills to remove any impurity and to purify. This is similar to what is said in this verse: *Allah does not wish to place you in difficulty, but purify you, and to complete His favour upon you, that you may be grateful* (5:6).

However, if this meaning is what is intended, then none of the above possible interpretations work, since verse 33:33 is specific to only the *People of the House*, whereas verse 5:6 is general and addressed to all Muslims who are tasked with adhering to religious law.

Part 2:

Another possibility is that "removing impurity" and "purifying" refer to strict, severe piety, and that this sentence emphasizes the religious duties of the wives of the Prophet and their doubled recompense. This too would not benefit God but rather would be a means for God to divest them of any impurity and to purify them. Then, it is extended to others beyond them after they have been specified. However, the same problem arises here: namely, other people do not share the strict responsibilities assigned to the Prophet's wives, or their doubled punishment or reward.

Question: But why can't this verse address the wives of the Prophet and the Prophet himself? After all, like his wives, the Prophet also bears a heavy weight of duty.

Reply: The Prophet is different from his wives, for he has been protected from sin (he has *ʿiṣmah*). This is a divine gift not earned through one's acts. It would make no sense to emphasize his duty, to threaten him with a double punishment, or to promise him a double reward in order to inspire a strict sense of reverence (*taqwā*) inside him. Therefore, this sentence cannot be addressed solely to him and his wives. We mention this possibility only because it is something plausible that someone might ask about, and because it is a more correct way of evaluating the exegetical view that these words address only his wives [which, as has been explained above, is grammatically incorrect], not because exegetes actually hold this view.

Part 3:

God's will in "removing impurity" and "purifying" could be taken in

an absolute and unconditional sense rather than specifically to mean strict observance of religious duties. That is, it could mean that God is divesting them of any sort of impurity and cleansing them simply because they are the Prophet's household or kin. However, this would conflict with the emphasis on reverence (*taqwā*) as a condition for the wives of the Prophet to enjoy an honourable status; this conflict persists whether one interprets God's will here as a legislative obligation [that is, God commanding and forbidding actions] or a creational act [God willing something to be, and it is].

The Author's View

The foregoing reinforces the narrations about why the verse was revealed. [That is, the fact that the foregoing interpretations intrinsically do not work reinforces the view in the narrations.] These narrations indicate that *People of the House* (Ahl al-Bayt) specifically refers to the Prophet, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, and do not include anyone else.

Many narrations—more than 70—say this. There are more Sunni than Shiʿi narrations saying this, since the Sunni narrations have been related through many chains, such as from Um Salamah, ʿĀʾishah, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Saʿd, Wāʾilah ibn al-Asqaʿ, Abu al-Ḥamrāʾ, Ibn ʿAbbās, Thawbān (the *mawlā* or freedman of the Prophet),[1] ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jaʿfar, ʿAlī, and al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī via nearly 40 chains of narration. Shiʿi narrations on this are related from ʿAlī, al-Sajjād, al-Bāqir, al-Ṣādiq, and al-Riḍā, as well as Um Salamah, Abū Dharr, Abu Laylā, Abu al-Aswad al-Duʾalī, ʿAmr ibn Maymūn al-Awdī, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ via over 30 chains.

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1 The word *mawlā* was often used for a freed slave who maintained a relationship with or continued to serve his former master, oftentimes out of personal loyalty or to ally himself with one of the Arab tribes due to being a foreigner. It is said in Usd al-Ghābah that Thawbān was originally from Yemen but was captured and sold on the slave market. The Prophet bought him in order to release him. However, Thawbān did not want to leave the Prophet, so the Prophet told Thawbān that he could choose either to return home to his kinsmen or to stay on with the household of the Prophet. Thawbān elected to stay with the Prophet and outlived the Prophet. Ibn Athīr, Usd al-Ghābah, vol. 1 (Tehran: Nāṣir Khawrso, n.d.), p. 249. As indicated by ʿAllāmah here, Thawbān appears as a narrator of ḥadīth.
This is different from the use of *mawlā* to mean "master" or "guardian"; for instance, as the Prophet said on the day of Ghadīr, "ʿAlī is the master (*mawlā*) of whomever I am the master (*mawlā*) of." (Trans.)

Objection: Some might argue that although these narrations specify ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn as the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt), they do not preclude the possibility of including the wives of the Prophet in the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt), especially since the previous section of the verse addresses them.

Reply: Many of these narrations, especially the ones related from Um Salamah—in whose house the verse was revealed—specify that the People of the House (Ahl al-Bayt) refers specifically to these individuals and do not include any of the wives of the Prophet, and some of these narrations are graded as "authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*)". They will be discussed later in the section on narrations.

Another Objection: Some might argue that these narrations are in opposition to the Qur'an [and hence should be discarded] since the Qur'an itself addresses the wives of the Prophet in the first part of the verse [and hence the wives of the Prophet should be included in the Ahl al-Bayt].

Reply: The real question here is whether or not this verse was revealed all at once. That is, was this part of the verse pertaining to purification (known as *āyat al-taṭhīr*) revealed at the same time and under the same circumstances as the previous sections addressing the wives of the Prophet?

While many *ḥadīth* describe the revelation of this part of the verse, they all portray it as having been revealed alone. That is, the sentence *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* was not revealed at the same time as the previous parts of the same verse or the previous/succeeding verses. Not a single one of these 70 hadith claims that this part of the verse was revealed as a conclusion to the address to the wives of the Prophet, and no one claims this—not even those who say that *People of the House* refers to the wives of the Prophet, such as ʿIkrimah and ʿUrwah.

Simply put, this part of the verse (*Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully*) is fully separate from the segment about the wives of the Prophet, and is not linked to it. Either this part of the verse was placed here at the command of the Prophet, or it was done during the compilation of the Qur'an after the Prophet left this world.

The previous and succeeding text (which is all addressed to the wives of the Prophet), supports the idea that this part of the verse (which is not addressed to the wives of the Prophet) is an outlier. That is, this section is

preceded by *and stay in your homes…* (33:33) and followed by *and remember the signs [verses of Allah]…* (33:34), both of which are addressed to the wives of the Prophet in the second person feminine plural. It is only this phrase—*Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33)—that interrupts the flow. Therefore, it does not come across as part of the original address to the wives of the Prophet. This phrase also comes across as being of loftier import than the commands specific to the wives of the Prophet.

This is similar to verse 5:3, in which the sentence *today, the disbelievers despair* (5:3) appears among a list of prohibited foods although unrelated and of different import. [Hence, it was likely placed in that verse later rather than being revealed at the same time as the rest of the verse.] This matter was discussed in Volume 5 of this work.[1]

With that in mind, "Ahl al-Bayt" as used here in the Qur'an is a technical term with a specific meaning. It refers specifically to these five people—the Prophet, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn—and may not be applied to anyone else, even the Prophet's nearest kin, and even if customary usage might include such people in the general expression *ahl al-bayt*.

Allah wills to remove any impurity* (rijs) *from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully: *Rijs* comes from the noun *rajāsah* ("dirt", "filth", "shamefulness") and means "filthiness" or "impurity". Filth is something that a person avoids and shies away from, and can be used either in a physical or a metaphorical sense. It is used in a physical sense for pork in *[forbidden to you is] the meat of pigs, for it is filthy (*rijs*)* (6:154). Here, in 33:33, it is used in a metaphorical sense, speaking of spiritual dirt (not physical dirt), like associating partners with God (*shirk*), denial or ingratitude (*kufr*), or the aftereffects of committing vile deeds. God says:

*As for those in whose hearts is a disease, they pile up dirt onto dirt [in their hearts] (*rijsan ilā rijsihim*), and they die disbelieving.* (9:125)

*Allah quashes and tightens the chests of those whom He wills to leave wandering, as if they are climbing up towards the sky. Thus, Allah heaps dirt [or shame] (*rijs*) upon those who disbelieve.* (6:125)

However the word *rijs* is used, it is something which the human being perceives with their inner faculties. This inner sort of *rijs* arises through setting one's heart on false beliefs or as the result of committing vile deeds.

Verse 33:33 speaks of the removal of *rijs*. The *al-* in *al-rijs* in this verse is for generality, meaning that it encompasses any and all forms of

1 See the exegesis of 5:3. (Trans.)

impurity. This verse speaks of removing any impurity in any shape or form that might misguide a person from true beliefs or correct acts. Therefore, what naturally follows from this is divinely granted *ʿiṣmah* (divine protection from error or sin), which is a mental faculty that protects a person from false beliefs or ugly deeds.

In our previous discussion above [on the views which ʿAllāmah rejects], we made clear that the idea that this verse means that God intends for the People of the House to be reverent or to strictly observe their religious duties does not fit with the text. This is because these things are not limited to the People of the House; rather, all people should be reverent and observe their religious duties. Furthermore, it does not fit with the status of the Prophet. [That is, assuming that the Prophet is one of the People of the House, it would be meaningless to tell him to be reverent or to observe his religious duties since he is already divinely protected from sin.]

Therefore, "removing impurity" and "purification" must be understood with the Prophet's sinlessness in mind. "Purifying" is emphasized by repeating the verbal noun after the verb [that is, it literally says "purify you with a purification", or *yuṭahhirakum taṭhīran*, where both words come from the root *ṭ-h-r*, meaning to be pure]. "Purification" means removing the aftereffects of uncleanliness after removing an original impurity. It is commonly agreed that the opposite of "false beliefs" is "true beliefs". Therefore, purifying a person of false beliefs involves equipping them with the capacity to perceive truth in beliefs and deeds. Here, *Allah wills* does not mean that God is passing a law to be acted upon or that God is imposing a religious obligation, since it has already been shown that this possibility does not suit the status [of the Prophet] at all.

It means: God continuously wills to single you, Ahl al-Bayt, out for the divine gift of protection from error or sin by keeping you away from any false beliefs or the impact of vile deeds. This continuous divine will results in you being protected from error or sin. [That is, it results in them being *maʿṣūm*.]

وَاذْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

(33:34) ***And remember*** **(wadhkurna)** ***the signs [verses] of Allah***

and wisdom that is recited in your homes. Allah has always been subtle, aware.

Remember here comes across as having been intended to mean the opposite of "forget". This emphasizes the strict commandments given to the wives of the Prophets. This verse embarks upon a second exhortation to the wives of the Prophet, just as the previous verses conveyed the first exhortation outlining their duties. *In your homes* also adds emphasis.[1]

It means: "Keep in mind the verses and wisdom recited in your homes so that you do not lapse or slip off of the path set out for you."

Some exegetes say that it means, "Be grateful to God that He has located you in houses where the Qur'an and Sunnah are recited." However, this interpretation is rather distant from what the text actually says, especially since the verse wraps up with *Allah has always been subtle, aware*.

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٣٥﴾

(33:35) ***The submitting [Muslim] men and women, and the faithful men and women, and the obedient men and women, and the truthful men and women, and the patient men and women, and the men and women who fear [Allah], and the men and women who give charity, and the men and women who fast, and the men and women who guard their private parts, and the men and women who remember [Allah]—Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great recompense.***

Men and women are honoured equally in the eyes of Islam. God illustrates this generally in verses such as:

1 Perhaps this is because in your homes was in the previous verse, or perhaps it is because it would be particularly inappropriate for the wives of the Prophet to neglect the revelation that comes down in their very homes. (Trans.)

O people! We created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. The most honourable of you before Allah is the most reverent. (49:13)

This principle is further clarified in verses such as:

I will not waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female. (3:195)

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Then, this principle is further clarified in this verse.

The submitting [Muslim] men and women **(al-muslimīna wa al-muslimāt)*****, and the faithful men and women*** **(al-muʾminīna wa al-muʾmināt)*****:*** This phrase implies a difference between a Muslim and a believer (*muʾmin*). It is similar to this verse:

The Arabs say, We have believed. Say, You do not have faith; rather, say, 'We submit' [or 'We are Muslims'], for faith has not yet entered your hearts … The faithful are those who believe in Allah and His Messenger, then doubt not, and they strive with their wealth and their persons in the way of Allah. (49:14-15)

This demonstrates that, firstly, being merely a Muslim pertains to the actions performed externally with one's limbs [such as going through the motions of religious observances], whereas faith pertains to the heart. Secondly, as a matter pertaining to the heart, faith relates to inner beliefs and inner surrender [to God, or to the faith]; however, these inner beliefs then percolate out into the actions performed by one's limbs [such as the sincere and selfless deeds mentioned in the above verse].

Therefore, *islām* [as a verb meaning "to submit" or "to become Muslim"] can be defined as "submission through one's actions to the religion through carrying out its main commandments", and a *muslim* and *muslimah* [the masculine and feminine form of "one who submits" or "a Muslim"] can be defined as those who do that.

Faith (*īmān*) pertains to those who cherish the religion in their hearts in such a way that it then inspires the acts of their limbs. A *muʾmin* and *muʾminah* [male and female person with faith] is therefore one who cherishes the religion in his or her heart in such a way that it inspires the acts of his or her limbs. All of the faithful are Muslim, but not all Muslims are faithful.

The obedient men and women **(al-qānitīna wa al-qānitāt)*****:*** Obedience (*qunūt*) is said to mean obeying submissively.

The truthful men and women **(al-ṣādiqīna wa al-ṣādiqāt)*****:*** Truthfulness

pertains to whether or not what a person says or shows concords with reality. *The truthful* are truthful in their claims, speech, and promises.

The patient men and women **(al-ṣābirīna wa al-ṣābirāt):** They are the ones who are patient in times of trial and difficulty, as well as patient in performing their religious obligations and patient in abstaining from sin.

The men and women who fear [Allah] **(al-khāshiʿīna wa al-khāshiʿāt):** Fear (*khushūʿ*) is an inner feeling of humility in the heart, just as *khuḍūʿ* ("being submissive", "being humbled") is an outer expression of humility with the limbs.

The men and women who give charity **(al-mutaṣaddiqīna wa al-mutaṣaddiqāt):** Charity (*ṣadaqah*) is spending one's wealth in the way of God, and it includes the required *zakāt* (alms-tax).

The men and women who fast **(al-ṣāʾimīna wa al-ṣāʾimāt):** This refers to both the required and recommended fasting.

The men and women who guard their private parts **(al-ḥāfiẓīna furūjahum wa al-ḥāfiẓāt):** Meaning, they keep them away from people who are not lawful to them. *Furūjahunna* is implied at the end of the phrase.[1]

The men and women who remember [Allah] **(al-dhākirīna Allāha kathīr^{an} wa al-dhākirāt):** The word *Allāh* (God) is omitted and left implied at the end of the phrase because it is obvious.[2] They are those who abundantly remember God with their tongues and when lying on their sides,[3] and this includes the ritual prayers and the hajj.

Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great recompense: *Forgiveness* and *a great recompense* are left in the indefinite form in order to signify how expansive they are.

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1 That is, the phrase literally says *al-ḥāfiẓīna furūjahum wa al-ḥāfiẓāt*, literally meaning "the men who protect their private parts, and the women". The omission of private parts after "women" could be for the sake of modesty, or it could be intended to place greater emphasis on a man's responsibility in this matter. Or it could simply be because the meaning is apparent, and there is no need to repeat it, as is done in the subsequent phrase. (Trans.)

2 Literally, this phrase says "the men who remember God abundantly, and the women."

3 A reference to Qur'an 3:191 which speaks of those who remember God when standing, sitting, or lying on their sides. (Trans.)

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *O Prophet! Say to your wives…* (33:28), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:

This verse was revealed when the Prophet returned from the Battle of Khaybar with war booty from the people of Abū al-Ḥuqayq, and his wives told him, "Give us some of what you have acquired."

The Messenger of God said, "I have distributed it among the Muslims at the command of God, the Mighty and Glorious."

Angry, they said, "Maybe you have realized that if you divorce us, none of us will find a match among our peoples to remarry?"

God, the Mighty and Glorious, chafed at they were saying to His Prophet, so He commanded him to separate from them for a while. So the Messenger of God kept away from them and stayed in the garden of Um Ibrāhīm (*mashrabat Um Ibrāhīm*) for 29 days until their monthly cycles had run their courses and they had become pure.

Then God, the Mighty and Glorious, sent down this verse offering them a choice: *O Prophet! Say to your wives, If you desire the life of this world and its ornaments, then come; I shall provide for you and release you fairly* (33:28).

So Um Salamah got up—and she was the first to get up—and said, "I choose God and His Messenger." So, all of them got up and embraced him and said something similar.

Author's comments: A similar narration is also related via Sunni chains, although some of them say that first to choose God and His Messenger was ʿĀʾishah.

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from Dāwūd ibn Sarḥān from Abū ʿAbdillāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq]:

Zaynab bint Jaḥsh said: "The Messenger of God knows that if he lets us go, we will not find husbands other than him."

When she said that, he had already spent 29 nights away from his wives. So God sent Jibrāʾīl to tell Muḥammad, "*O Prophet! Say to your wives, 'If you desire the life of this world and its ornaments, then come; I shall provide for you and release you fairly. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the hereafter—Allah has prepared a great reward for the virtuous among*

you.'" (33:28-29).
Then they [his wives] said, "Nay, we choose God and His Messenger and the hereafter."

(3) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from ʿĪṣ ibn al-Qāsim from Abī ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣadiq]:
I [ʿĪṣ ibn al-Qāsim] asked him [Imām al-Ṣādiq], "What happens when a man gives his wife a choice [to stay or leave], and she decides on divorce?"[1]
He [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said, "No. This was only for the Messenger of God. He was commanded to do that, and he did that. If they had chosen divorce [then they would have been divorced]. God says: *O Prophet! Say to your wives, If you desire the life of this world and its ornaments, then come; I shall provide for you and release you fairly. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the hereafter—Allah has prepared a great reward for the virtuous among you*. (33:28-29).

(4) It is related in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* from al-Wāḥidī via a chain of narration from Saʿīd ibn Jubayr that Ibn ʿAbbās said:
The Messenger of God was sitting with Ḥafṣah, and they fell into a quarrel. So he told her, "Should I ask a man to come [arbitrate] between us?"
She said, "Yes."
So he sent for ʿUmar.[2] When ʿUmar came, he told her, "Speak to me."
She said, "O Messenger of God, speak, and do not say anything but the truth."
ʿUmar slapped her hard twice.
The Prophet told him, "Enough."
ʿUmar said, "O she-enemy of God, the Prophet never says

1 The questioner is putting forward a question about Islamic law based on what he perceives as a precedent in this verse. His implied question is along the lines of "if she decides on divorce, is he obliged to divorce her?" or "if she decides on divorce, does this result in divorce without regard to the other procedures involved in divorce?" (Trans.)

2 ʿUmar was her father. (Trans.)

anything but the truth! By the One who sent him in truth, were he not sitting here, I would not have stayed my hand until you were dead."
Then the Prophet got up and climbed up to a room and stayed in it for a month. He did not come near any of his wives to eat or sleep. Then God revealed these verses.

(5) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is related from Imām al-Ṣādiq:
The Prophet married 15 wives, and 13 of the marriages were consummated. When he died, he left behind 9 widows. The 2 marriages that were not consummated were with ʿUmrah[1] and Sanā.[2] Of the 13 marriages that were consummated, the first was with Khadījah bint al-Khuwaylid. Then [his later wives were] Sawdah bint Zamʿah; Um Salamah, whose name was Hind bint Abī Umayyah); Um ʿAbdullah ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr; Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar; Zaynab bint Khuzaymah ibn al-Ḥarīth, [known as] the Mother of the Poor (*Um al-Masākīn*); Zaynab bint Jaḥsh; Um Ḥabīb Ramlah bint Abī Sufyān; Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith; Zaynab bint ʿUmays; Juwayriah bint al-Ḥārith, Ṣafiyyah bint Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab; and the one who gifted herself to the Prophet, Khawlah bint Ḥakīm al-Sulamī. He also had two slave-girls whom he divided his time between the same way as he did with his other wives: Māriyah al-Qibṭiyyah and Rayḥānah al-Khandafiyya h. [That is, he treated his free wives and slave wives the same with respect to how he scheduled his time with them.] The nine whom he left behind as widows were ʿĀʾishah, Ḥafṣah, Um Salamah, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, Maymūnah bint al-Ḥārith, Um Ḥabīb bint Abi Sufyān, Juwayriyah, Sawdah, and Ṣafiyyah. The best of them was Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, then Um Salamah, then Maymūnah.

(6) Regarding verses 33:32-33 (*O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women…Allah wills to remove any impurity from you,*

1 ʿUmrah bint Yazīd al-Kilābiyyah, whom the Prophet divorced before the marriage was consummated. (Trans.)

2 Sanā bint Asmāʾ al-Sulamiyyah, who died before the marriage was consummated. (Trans.)

O People of the House, and purify you fully), *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* relates:[1]

A man told [Imām al-Sajjād], "You, Ahl al-Bayt, have been forgiven."

This made [Imām al-Sajjād] angry, and he replied, "It is more appropriate to say about us what was said regarding the wives of the Prophet: we see that those who do good among us are rewarded doubly, and those who do wrong among us are punished doubly."

(7) Regarding *And do not flaunt your charms as was done in the first Age of Ignorance* (33:33), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* relates (without a chain of narration) from Abī ᶜAbd Allah [Imām al-Ṣādiq] that his father [Imām al-Bāqir] said:

Yes, there shall be another Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).

Author's comments: This is a subtle, sophisticated way of deriving meaning from the verse.

(8) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Ṭabarānī relates from Um Salmah:

The Messenger of God told Fāṭimah, "Bring me your husband and two sons."

She brought them to him, and the Messenger of God cast a cloak (*kisāʾ*) from Fadak over them. Then he placed his hand over them and said, "O God! These are the *ahl* (family)"—or, according to another version, "the *āl* (family)"[2]—"of Muḥammad. So send Your blessings (*ṣalawātak*) and grace (*barakātak*) upon the family (*āl*) of Muḥammad just as you sent them upon Abraham; You are praiseworthy, glorious."

I [Um Salamah] lifted the cloak so I could join them under it, but

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1 This is related from Muḥammad ibn Abī ᶜUmayr from Ibrāhīm from ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd from ᶜAlī ibn ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn from his father from ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn [Imām al-Sajjād].

2 While both *āl* and *ahl* share the meaning of "family", *ahl* typically has the connotation of one's household, or spouse and children, as well as kinsfolk, whereas *āl* often has a broader connotation of "clan", "lineage", "descendants", or "kinsfolk". *Ahl* is also frequently used for people who are not kin but who are linked in other ways, such as the people of a certain region or who share a certain ideology. (Trans.)

he tugged it away from my hand and said, "You are upon goodness." [That is, he prevented her from joining them.]

Author's comments: This is narrated in *Ghāyat al-Marām* from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal from his father with a chain of narration from Um Salamah.

(9) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates that Um Salamah said:

This verse—*Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33)—descended in my house while seven were in the house: Jibrīl, Mīkāʾīl, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn [as well as the Prophet], while I was at the door of the house. I said, "O Messenger of God! Am I not from the Ahl al-Bayt?"

He said, "You are upon goodness. You are one of the wives of the Prophet."

(10) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh regarding Um Salamah, the wife of the Prophet:

The Messenger of God was in her house and was asleep under a cloak from Khaybar. Fāṭimah brought a stone cooking-pot (*burmah*) of stew (*khazīrah*), and the Messenger of God told her, "Call your husband and two children, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn." She went and got them, and they were eating when revelation descended to the Messenger of God: *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33).

So the Prophet covered them with the extra cloth from his waist-wrap. Then he took his hand out from under the cloak, gestured to the heavens, and said, "O God! These are my Ahl al-Bayt and my special ones, so remove from them any impurity and purify them completely." He said that three times.

I [Um Salamah] stuck my head beneath the cloth and said, "O Messenger of God! Am I with you?"

He said, "You are upon goodness. You are upon goodness."

Author's comments: This *ḥadīth* is narrated in Ghāyat al-Marām from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal via three chains of narration from Um Salamah, and similarly in *Tafsīr al-Thaʿlabī*.

(11) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Mardawayh and

al-Khaṭīb from Abu Saʿīḍ al-Khudrī:
It was the day of Um Salamah, the Mother of the Faithful[1] [that is, the day that the Prophet would stay in her house] when Jibrīl brought this verse to the Messenger of God: *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33).
So the Prophet called for Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Fāṭimah, and ʿAlī, and embraced them. Then he covered them with a thobe, while Um Salmah was hidden behind a curtain. He said, "O God! These are my Ahl al-Bayt. O God, remove from them any impurity, and purify them completely."
Um Salamah said, "I am among them, O Prophet of God?"
He said, "You have your own position, and you are upon goodness."

(12) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and al-Ṭabarānī from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī that the Messenger of God said:
This verse was sent down about five—myself, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn—*Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33).

Author's comments: This is also narrated in *Ghāyat al-Marām* from *Tafsīr al-Thaʿlabī*.

(13) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related that Um Salamah said:[2]
It was in my house that *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33) was revealed. At that time, Fāṭimah, ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn were in the house.
The Messenger of God covered them with a cloak had been upon himself. Then he said, "These are my Ahl al-Bayt, so remove from them any impurity and purify them completely."

1 An honorific for the wives of the Prophet. (Trans.)

2 It is related from al-Tirmidhī, who considers it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*); Ibn Jarīr; Ibn al-Mundhir; al-Ḥākim, who considers it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*); Ibn Mardawayh; and al-Bayhaqī in his Sunan via chains of narration from Um Salamah.

(14) In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, it is related from al-Ḥamīdī:

64 of the agreed-upon authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) narrations from ʿĀʾishah in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (transmitted from Muṣʿab ibn Shaybah from Ṣafiyyah bint Shaybah from ʿĀʾishah) relate she said:

One morning, the Prophet went out wearing a striped cloak made of black hair. Then al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī came, and the Prophet wrapped him beneath it. Then [the same happened with] al-Ḥusayn, then Fāṭimah, then ʿAlī. Then he said, "*Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully*" (33:33).

Author's comments: This *ḥadīth* is also related through other chains of narration.

(15) It is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Ibn Mardawayh from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī:

After ʿAlī married Fāṭimah, the Prophet came to their door for 40 days in the morning and said, "Peace be upon you, Ahl al-Bayt, and the mercy of God and His blessings! Prayer [time], may God have mercy upon you! *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33). I am an enemy to whoever is your enemy, and I am at peace with whoever is at peace with you."

(16) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ʿAbbās:

We saw the Messenger of God for nine months coming every day to the door of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib at each time for prayer and saying, "Peace be upon you, and the mercy of God and His blessings, Ahl al-Bayt. *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33)."

Author's comments: This is also related from al-Ṭabarānī from Abū al-Ḥamrāʾ with the wording: "I saw the Messenger of God come to the door of ʿAlī and Fāṭimah for six months saying, 'God wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully' (33:33)."

It is also related by Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Mardawayh from Abū al-Ḥamrāʾ in the following words:

> I saw that, for 8 months in Medina, the Messenger of God never once went to the morning prayer without first going to the door of ʿAlī, placing his hand on the two sides of the door, and saying, "Prayer! Prayer! *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33)."

This is also related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Ibn Abī Shaybah; Aḥmad; al-Tirmidhī ,who considers it acceptable (*ḥasan*); Ibn Jarīr; Ibn Mundhir; al-Ṭabarānī; al-Ḥākim, who considers it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*); Ibn Mardawayh; and Anas in the following wording:

> The Messenger of God used to go to the door of Fāṭimah whenever he went for the morning prayer and say, "Prayer, O Ahl al-Bayt! *Allah wills to remove any impurity from you, O People of the House, and purify you fully* (33:33)."

Author's comments: There are many narrations with this meaning related through Sunni and Shiʿi chains. Whoever wishes to know more about them should consult *Ghāyat al-Marām* by al-Baḥrānī and *al-ʿAbaqāt*.

(17) In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, it is related from al-Ḥamawaynī with a chain of narration from Yazīd ibn Ḥayyān, who said:

> We came to Zayd ibn Arqam, and he said, "The Messenger of God gave a sermon to us and said, 'Beware! I have left behind among you two things. One of them is the Book of God, the Mighty, the Glorious. Whoever follows it shall be guided, and whoever abandons it shall be misguided. The other is my Ahl al-Bayt. I urge you to remember God regarding my Ahl al-Bayt. I urge you to remember God regarding my Ahl al-Bayt. I urge you to remember God regarding my Ahl al-Bayt."
>
> We said, "Are his wives from his Ahl al-Bayt?"
>
> He said, "No, his Ahl al-Bayt are the ones who are forbidden from accepting charity after him, and they are the descendants (*āl*) of ʿAlī, the descendants of ʿAbbās, the descendants of Jaʿfar and the descendants of ʿAqīl."

(18) In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, it is related from *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* via a chain of narration from Yazīd ibn Ḥayyan from Zayd ibn Arqam:

> The Messenger of God said: "I am leaving behind among you two weighty things. One of them is the Book of God. It is the

rope of God. Whoever follows it shall be guided, and whoever abandons it shall be misguided. [And the second of which is my Ahl al-Bayt.][1]"

We said: "Are his wives included in his Ahl al-Bayt?"

He said: "No, by God. A woman may stay with a man some time, but then he divorces her, and she returns to her kith and kin. His Ahl al-Bayt are his blood relatives for whom charity is forbidden after him."

Author's comments: This narration interprets the term *bayt* ("house") as meaning "lineage" or "pedigree"; it is also used this way conventionally. For instance, the phrase *buyūtāt al-ʿarab* means "the Arab aristocracies" or "the noble houses of the Arabs". However, the previous narrations from Um Salamah and others refute the idea that this is the correct meaning of *bayt* here, and instead specify that the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt are ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, and their two sons.

(19) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related from Maqātil ibn Ḥayyān:

When Asmāʾ bint ʿUmays returned from al-Ḥabasha with her husband Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib, she went to the wives of the Messenger of God and said, "Was any of the Qur'an revealed about us?"

They said, "No."

So she went to the Messenger of God and said, "O Messenger of God, women are in disappointment and loss."

He said, "How so?"

She said, "Because they are not mentioned in the same good way that men are."

So God revealed the verse *The submitting [Muslim] men and women…* (33:35).

Author's comments: In other narrations, the person saying this is Um Salamah.

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1 This second clause is not mentioned in the text of this specific *ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* although it is implied in their discussion. (Trans.)

Verses 36-40

Verses 37-40 are about what happened when the Messenger of God married the [former] wife of Zayd, the Prophet's former slave whom he freed and adopted as a son. Likely, the verse, 33:36, also relates to this account and prefaces the succeeding verses.

Commentary

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا ﴿٣٦﴾

(33:36) ***And it is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, [for them] to have a choice about it. Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has clearly strayed.***

The context indicates that "decree" here means divine legislation of religious law, not the metaphysical divine decree. [That is, here, "decree" is being used in the sense of decreeing religious injunctions for people to follow, not God's decree of fate or to will something into being. There are two decrees mentioned here: God's and the Prophet's.] God's decree is when He establishes a ruling in religious law which His servants [that is, all human beings] must enact in the appropriate arena of their lives. God communicates this decree through the intermediary of one of His prophets. The Prophet's decree is when he decrees something in the context of managing the community or governance through the authority which God granted him in verses such as *the Prophet is more entitled to the faithful than their own souls* (33:6).

Ultimately, the Prophet's decree is through divine authority and hence from God, since God is the one who granted him authority to execute His command. The wording of this verse—*when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter*—indicates that "decree" here refers to matters of government or management of the people, since it discuss God and the Prophet together, whereas only God has the right to issue divine legislation (shariah).

It is not for a believing man or a believing woman: Meaning that none of the male or female believers have a right to maintain that they have a choice about what they have been commanded to do or that they can do whatever they want. *When Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter* is an adverbial phrase describing "not having a choice".

The plural pronoun *them* (-hum) in *[for them] to have a choice about it* (lahum al-khīrah min amrihim) encompasses all the believers, male and female, since they are all included in the prohibition [on having a choice]. A plural pronoun is used in *amrihim* rather than a singular pronoun to show that the reason why they imagine they have a choice about these things is because they see them as personal matters pertaining to themselves [that is, "their matters" in the plural] rather than as a single matter ordained by God.[1]

It means: When God and His Messenger have decreed a matter pertaining to them, it is not correct for any of them to treat it as a matter of personal choice or to say that it is their decision rather than a matter of God's or the Prophet's decree. Rather, they should simply obey the will of God and His Messenger.

This verse puts forward a general principle [not specific to any particular circumstances]. However, with the succeeding verses in mind, it is possible that it lays the ground for verse 33:40 (*Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men*), in that it hints that some people objected to the Prophet's marriage to Zayd's [former] wife and reproached him for that since she had been the wife of his adopted son. This will be discussed further in the section on narrations.

وَإِذْ تَقُولُ لِلَّذِى أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَأَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ أَمْسِكْ عَلَيْكَ زَوْجَكَ
وَاتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَتُخْفِى فِى نَفْسِكَ مَا اللَّهُ مُبْدِيهِ وَتَخْشَى النَّاسَ وَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ
تَخْشَاهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا قَضَىٰ زَيْدٌ مِنْهَا وَطَرًا زَوَّجْنَاكَهَا لِكَيْ لَا يَكُونَ عَلَى
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ حَرَجٌ فِى أَزْوَاجِ أَدْعِيَائِهِمْ إِذَا قَضَوْا مِنْهُنَّ وَطَرًا ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ
مَفْعُولًا ﴿٣٧﴾

1 Conversely, matter (*amran*) was used in the singular at the beginning of the verse to refer to God's singular decree, in contrast to their multiple views about their personal circumstances (*amrihim*). This nuance is not reflected in translation because it is difficult to render in English. (Trans.)

(33:37) ***And [remember] when you said to the one whom Allah had shown favour to and whom you had shown favour to, Hold fast to your wife, and be mindful of Allah. You concealed inside yourself what Allah would bring to light, and you feared people—although Allah has more right to be feared. And when Zayd had no further want of her, We wedded her to you, so that there would be no difficulty among the believers in marrying the [former] wives of their adopted sons, if they have no further want of them. And Allah's command is always carried out.***

The one whom God and the Prophet showed favor to is Zayd ibn Ḥārithah. Zayd had been a bondsman of the Prophet, but the Prophet freed him and adopted him. Zayd had been married to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, the daughter of the Prophet's paternal aunt. Zayd came to the Prophet and indicated that he wanted to divorce Zaynab. The Prophet told him not to do this, but Zayd divorced her anyway. The Prophet then married her, and this verse was revealed.

Whom Allah had shown favour to: Meaning, God guided him towards faith and endeared him to the Prophet.

And whom you had shown favour to: Meaning, treating him kindly, freeing him, and treating him as if he were your own son.

Hold fast to your wife, and be mindful of Allah: This is a figure of speech meaning "do not divorce her", although it hints that Zayd was insistent on divorcing her.

You concealed inside yourself what Allah would bring to light: Meaning, that which God would make known.

The penultimate verse in this section—*those who convey the messages of Allah and fear Him and fear none but Allah—Allah suffices as a Reckoner* (33:39)—shows that the Prophet did not fear the people for his own sake; rather, he feared them in the way of God [that is, he feared for his prophetic mission]. Therefore, he kept private what he kept private, because he sensed that, if he spoke of them, the people would rebuke him, and that some sick-hearted people would cast aspersions on him. This, in turn, might have a negative effect on the faith of the masses. This sort of fear—as you see—is not a blameworthy sort of fear. Rather, as such, it is fear for the sake of God—and, indeed, is fear of God, exalted be He.

And you feared people—although Allah has more right to be feared: This comes across as a gentle reproof nudging the Prophet away from this

sort of fear in the way of God—that is, fearing what the people might think. It also presents a different angle on how he should fear God—that is, it behoves him to fear God alone, not the people, and hence not to conceal inside himself what God would make clear.

This is the best evidence that God was the one who ordained that he marry the [former] wife of Zayd, his adopted son, so that it would allow other believers to marry the [former] spouses of their adopted children [if they so wished, whereas marrying the former spouse of one's biological child is religiously prohibited]. The Prophet kept this matter to himself because he feared negative consequences among the people, until God promised to secure him against any criticism. This is similar to the situation in this verse:

O Prophet! Convey what has been revealed to you from your Lord… and Allah will protect you from the people. (5:67)

The gentle reproof that is hinted at in *and you feared people—although Allah has more right to be feared* is in the context of God supporting and aiding the Prophet in the face of those sick-hearted people who would defame him, similar to:

Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave until those who spoke the truth had become manifest to you and you had known the liars? (9:43)

That God is supporting him in the face of potential criticism is further evinced by *and when Zayd had no further want of her, We wedded her to you*. This tells us that it was not the Prophet's choice to marry Zaynab; rather, it was done outside of his own will or choice. Then [this is reinforced by] *And Allah's command is always carried out*.

And when Zayd had no further want of her, We wedded her to you: This clause explains what happened next. "Had no further want of her" (*qaḍā… waṭaran*) is a polite way of saying that Zayd's marriage with her had been consummated and that Zayd had partaken in conjugal delights.

So that there would be no difficulty among the believers in marrying the [former] wives of their adopted sons, if they have no further want of them: This explains why God had the Prophet marry Zaynab, and the wisdom behind it.[1]

1 That is, it demonstrates that it is religiously permissible to marry the former spouse of one's adopted child (assuming there are no other restrictions on the marriage), even if the marriage had already been consummated. In contrast, according to sharīʿah, it is not permissible to marry the former spouse of one's biological child. (Trans.)

And Allah's command is always carried out: This indicates that this is what actually happened and reinforces the divine wisdom behind it.

From this, it becomes clear that what the Prophet hid inside himself was God's decree that he marry Zaynab, rather than his own personal desire to marry her or a passionate love for her although she was already married, as exegetes claim. They have made excuses for him on the grounds that falling in love is a normal human thing which no one is immune from. However, there are some problems with this view. First, would not his divine training overpower his natural instinct? Second, if this were the case, there would be no reason [for God] to criticize him for keeping this secret, since Islam disallows eyeing someone else's wife.

مَا كَانَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ مِنْ حَرَجٍ فِيمَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَهُ ۖ سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قَدَرًا مَقْدُورًا ﴿٣٨﴾

(33:38) ***There is no difficulty*** **(ḥaraj)** ***for the Prophet in what Allah has ordained*** **(faraḍa)** ***for him. It is the practice*** **(sunnah)** ***of Allah which was carried out with respect to those who came before, and the command of Allah is a decree determined.***

It is said that *ordained* (*faraḍa*) means "stipulated" or "assigned". Some also understand it to mean "allowed". *Ḥaraj* means "discomfort" or "difficulty". Here, by saying there is *no difficulty*, it means that there should be no reason for there to be any obstacle to something which God has decreed or allowed.

It means: There is nothing stopping the Prophet from doing what God has told him to do, or permitted him to do. There is neither any obstacle nor any hardship in doing that.

It is the practice **(sunnah)** ***of Allah which was carried out with respect to those who came before:*** The noun *sunnah* here is used in place for a verbal noun. It is part of an implied construction consisting of an implied verb with the same root, along the lines of *sanna Allāh dhālik sunnah* (lit. "God put into practice that practice (*sunnah*)"). *Those who came before* refers to the previous prophets and messengers; this is further evinced by the next clause: *those who convey the messages of Allah* (33:39).

And the command of Allah is a decree determined: Meaning, God decrees for every individual what is suitable for them. Furthermore, the prophets are allowed to do what other people are allowed to do, apart from

some allowances and prohibitions specific to the Prophet.

الَّذِينَ يُبَلِّغُونَ رِسَالَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَخْشَوْنَهُ وَلَا يَخْشَوْنَ أَحَدًا إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۗ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ حَسِيبًا ﴿٣٩﴾

(33:39) ***Those who convey the messages of Allah and fear Him and fear none but Allah—Allah suffices as a Reckoner.***

The relative pronoun *those* elaborates upon the people referred to by *those* in *those who came before*.

Fear (*khashiyah*) is a trait in the heart. It speaks either of fearing something undesired, or else fearing something which would cause something undesired. It can be used in the sense of "I feared that so-and-so would do something to me," or "I feared so-and-so, lest he do something to me." The prophets fear only God, for they know that only God controls the universe.

Khashiyah [the type of fear discussed in this verse] differs from *khawf*. *Khawf* is the type of fear or unease that impels a person to guard against a threat, whether or not fear actually strikes their heart. It is an external matter, pertaining to one's deeds. The prophets can be described as having *khawf* of human beings. For instance, Moses says: *So I fled from you when I feared you (*khiftukum*)* (26:21).

It is also used for the Prophet:

*If you fear (*takhāfanna*) treachery from a people…* (8:58).

These are the original, root meanings of *khawf* and *khashiyah*, although they are sometimes used as synonyms.

Therefore, it is clear that the prophets do not experience the type of fear known as *khashiyah* [unless it is *khashiyah* of God], even if the context surrounding *those who convey the messages of Allah and fear Him* (33:39) implies a hesitancy in delivering the message . However, all that the prophets do and say is part of their delivery of the message; therefore, fearing that something may interfere with their delivery of the message is part and parcel of their other deeds.

***And Allah suffices as a reckoner* (ḥasīban):** Meaning, God accounts for all deeds, small and large; therefore, only He must be feared.

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾

(33:40) ***Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets, and Allah knows all things.***

Without doubt, this verse is in the context of dispelling their objections to the Prophet marrying the [former] wife of his [adopted] son. It makes it clear that the Prophet was neither Zayd's biological father nor the biological father of any men at that time; therefore it would have been impossible for the Prophet to have married the ex-wife of any of his sons, since he did not have any. The clause, *of any of your men* speaks of the people who were alive at the time when the verse was revealed, and *men* refers specifically to grown men (as opposed to women or children). Here, God is not giving the Prophet a command [such as "do not sire male children"]; rather, it is expressing that God fated the Prophet not to be the father of any surviving male children.

It means: Muḥammad is not the father of any of these men you see around you, such that you could accuse him of marrying his son's former wife. Zayd *is* a man whom you see around you, and the Prophet married Zayd's former wife after Zayd divorced her. However, this is not the same thing as marrying the former wife of your biological son. Just because the Prophet adopted Zayd does not mean that Zayd is subject to the same strictures as a biological son; calling someone your son does not make them the same as biological child [in the sense of shariah regulations].[1]

As for al-Qāsim, al-Ṭayyib, al-Ṭāhir, and Ibrāhim, they were biological sons of the Prophet, but they died before they could reach manhood. Therefore, they were not men at the time the verse was revealed, and their birth does not contradict this verse. Similarly, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn were [grand]sons of the Messenger of God; however, he passed away before they grew to manhood.

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1 Adoption is a sometimes misunderstood subject in Islam. Muslims are encouraged to take in and raise children who are orphaned or in need. However, taking in a child to raise as one's own does not result in the child actually becoming equivalent to a biological child in terms of the regulations of shariah; for instance, one should not willingly adjust a birth certificate to reflect the adopted parents' names rather than the biological parents' names. It is not acceptable in Islam to claim that an adopted child is one's own biological child; rather, the child's biological lineage should be preserved and acknowledged as much as possible. (Trans.)

Therefore, the birth of al-Qāsim, al-Ṭayyib, al-Ṭāhir, and Ibrāhim—and, for that matter, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn—does not contradict this verse, since none of them could have been called "men" at the time it was revealed.

But he is the Messenger of Allah and the seal* (khātam) *of the prophets: A *khātam* ("seal", "stamp") is something that seals a thing; it is also used in for a thing which imprints a seal (such as a signet ring). By saying that the Prophet is the *seal of the prophets*, this verse is saying that prophethood comes to a conclusion with him, and there is no prophet after him.

Previously, the meanings of "messengership" (*risālah*) and "prophethood" (*nubuwwah*) were discussed; we said that a messenger (*rasūl*) is one who delivers a message from God to the people, and a prophet (*nabī*) is a person who delivers news of the unseen —namely, regarding religion (*dīn*) and its truths. Therefore, a messenger must be a prophet, since delivering a message from God is a form of providing news of the unseen. As a result, once prophethood has come to an end, so too must messengership come to an end.[1]

Therefore, since the Prophet Muḥammad is the *seal of the prophets*, he must also be the seal of the messengers [that is, there will be neither another prophet nor another messenger after the Prophet Muḥammad].

Mentioning this here draws one's mind to the fact that the relationship of the Prophet to his people is one of a messenger and prophet to his people [rather than the relationship of one ordinary person to another]; therefore, anything that the Prophet does is at the command of God, exalted be He.

And Allah knows all things: Meaning, what He has made clear to you was already in the scope of His knowledge.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Jarīr relates that Ibn ʿAbbās said: The Prophet proposed to Zaynab bint Jaḥsh on behalf of Zayd ibn Ḥārithah, but she snubbed the idea of marrying Zayd and

1 In that discussion, in English vol. 3, the author says that the words of God do not show any difference between *rasūl* and *nabī* except what appears from their literal meaning. Also, a messenger has the distinction of being an intercessor (or intermediary) between God and His creatures, and the prophet has the distinction of having the knowledge of God and from God. (Pub.)

said, "I am of nobler birth than him," and she was a vehement woman. So God sent down the following verse: *And it is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, to have a choice about it. Whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has clearly strayed.* (33:36).

Author's comments: Other narrations also convey this meaning.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Abū Ḥātim from Ibn Zayd:

This verse was revealed about Um Kulthūm, the daughter of ʿUqbah ibn Abī Muʿayṭ. She was the first woman to migrate to Medina and gifted herself to the Prophet. He, in turn, married her to Zayd ibn Ḥārithah. She and her brother were irritated at that. She said, "We sought the Messenger of God, but he married us to his slave." Then this verse was revealed.

Author's comments: These two narrations come across more as applications of the verse [rather than the actual reason for revelation].

(3) In *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, in the account of the audience that al-Maʾmūn held with Imām Riḍa and leaders of other faiths and sects, in the section on Imām Riḍā's response to ʿAlī ibn al-Jahm regarding the sinlessness of the prophets, Imām Riḍā said:

As for Muḥammad and the verse *You concealed inside yourself what Allah would bring to light, and you feared people—although Allah has more right to be feared* (33:37): God, the Mighty and Glorious, told the Prophet the names of his wives in this world and his wives in the hereafter, and told him that they are the Mothers of the Believers. One of those who was named was Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, but, at that time, she was married to Zayd ibn Ḥārithah. So he kept her name hidden inside himself. He did not tell anyone lest one of the hypocrites accuse him of calling another man's wife *his* wife and saying she was one of the Mothers of the Believers. Since he feared what the hypocrites might say, God, the Mighty and Glorious, said: *you feared people—although Allah has more right to be feared* (33:37), meaning inside yourself.

Author's comments: Similar narrations have been related in the same book from him in response to al-Maʾmūn's question to him about the

sinlessness of the prophets.

(4) *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* says regarding *You concealed inside yourself what Allah would bring to light* (33:37):
It is said that what he concealed inside himself was that God—exalted be He—had told him that she [Zaynab bint Jaḥsh] would be one of his wives, and that Zayd would divorce her. So when Zayd came and told him, "I want to divorce Zaynab," he said, "*Hold fast to your wife*," and God—exalted be He—said, "Why did you say, '*Hold fast to your wife*,' while you know that she will be one of your wives?" And this is [also] narrated from ᶜAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn.

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related that Anas said:[1]
Zayd ibn Ḥārithah came complaining about Zaynab to the Messenger of God, so the Messenger of God told him, "Be mindful of God, and hold fast to your wife." Then this verse descended: *You concealed inside yourself what Allah would bring to light* (33:37).
Had the Messenger of God hidden anything, he would have hidden this verse. So the Messenger of God married her.

Author's comments: There are many narrations that say this, although there are doubts surrounding most of them. One account says that none of the wives of the Messenger of God had a wedding feast like that of Zaynab bint Jaḥsh; he slaughtered a sheep and fed the people with meat and bread. Another says that she used to pride herself above the other wives of the Prophet on account of three things: that she and the Prophet had the same grandfather; that she was the daughter of Umaymah bint ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the paternal aunt of the Prophet; and that the one who had married her to him was none other than God—exalted be He—while the matchmaker was Jibrīl.

(6) Regarding *but he is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets* (33:40), *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* relates in an authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) hadith that Jābir ibn ᶜAbd Allāh said that the Prophet said:

1 It is related from Aḥmad, ᶜAbd ibn Ḥamīd, al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in his *Sunan*.

> The similitude of me among the other prophets is like that of a man who is building a house. He finished it and decorated it—all but one brick. Anyone who entered that house and beheld it would say, "How beautiful it is—except for that hole where the brick should be." I was the hole for that brick [in the house of prophethood; then I was declared a prophet and filled that hole]; through me, prophethood is sealed.
> Bukhārī and Muslim also relate this in their *Ṣaḥīḥ*s.

Author's comments: This idea recurs in other narrations such as from Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Aḥmad, and Ibn Mardawayh, and is related from people other than Jābir such as Abū Saʿīd and Abū Hurayrah.

(7) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from al-Anbārī in his *al-Maṣāhif* that Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī said:
> I used to recite Qur'an to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn [so that they might memorize it], and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib came to me while I was reciting the Qur'an to them. He said to me: "Recite to both of them, and the word *khātam* has an *a* after the *t* [that is, it is *khātam* not *khātim* or *khatm].*"

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Verses 41-48

The verses urge the faithful to remember and glorify God. They warmly promise a generous reward from the divine. They also speak to Prophet beautifully, and tell him to encourage the faithful and not to cede to the faithless or the hypocrites. Possibly, the verses about the faithful and the faithless were revealed at a different times.

Commentary

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٤١﴾

(33:41) ***O you who believe! Remember*** **(udhkurū)** ***Allah abundantly,***

"Remember" *(udhkurū,* from *dhikr*) is the opposite of "forget". It means to direct one's attention towards what is being remembered. While the word *dhikr* ("remembrance") can be used to mean uttering the names and attributes of God [such as when counting on a *tasbīḥ* or rosary], this is only one type of *dhikr*.

وَسَبِّحُوهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا ﴿٤٢﴾

(33:42) ***And glorify Him at daybreak*** **(bukratan)** ***and eventide*** **(aṣīlan).**

Glorify (*sabbiḥūhu*, from *tasbīḥ*) means to declare that God is above any sort of imperfection. Like *dhikr*, glorification does not need to be verbal; saying aloud *subḥan Allāh* ("glory be to God") is only one type of glorification.

Daybreak (bukratan) is the beginning of the day. *Eventide* (aṣīlan) is the end of the day, after the afternoon. *Daybreak* and *eventide* are singled out for glorification because these are liminal times [day turns to night, or night turns to day]. Therefore, it is particularly appropriate to glorify God at these times by declaring that God is above any sort of change or imperfection. [That is, God is eternally subsisting and everlasting, whereas the day and night ebb and flow.]. *Daybreak* and *eventide* can also be metaphorical for "at all times", as in this verse: *They glorify him night*

and day (41:38).

هُوَ الَّذِى يُصَلِّى عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتُهُۥ لِيُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَٰتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۚ وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا ﴿٤٣﴾

(33:43) *He is the one who blesses you* (yuṣallī ʿalaykum)*—as do the angels—that you may be led from darkness towards light. And He is merciful towards the faithful.*

Yuṣallī comes from *ṣalāt* ("prayers", "blessings") and overall has the meaning of *inʿiṭāf* ("bending", "bowing", or "inclining towards someone"). However, exegetes differ about how it should be understood here. Some say that *ṣalāt* from God means "God's mercy", *ṣalāt* from the angels means "their seeking forgiveness for someone", and *ṣalāt* from other people means "prayers for someone (*duʿāʾ*)". Here, this verse specifically explains that *ṣalāt* from God is His mercy—not any mercy, but a specific type of mercy towards the faithful, which brings them eternal happiness in the afterlife. This is explained in the subsequent clause: *that you may be led from darkness towards light. And He is merciful towards the faithful.*

Similarly, God links their forgetting Him to Him forgetting them, and their remembering Him to Him remembering them: *They forgot Allah, so He forgot them*. (8:67) *Remember Me, and I shall remember you.* (2:125)

His sending *ṣalāt* upon them is His remembering them mercifully. For if they remember Him abundantly, and glorify Him morning and evening, He blesses them abundantly, enwraps them with light, and keeps them away from the darkness.

From this, it is clear that *He is the one who blesses you* follows from *O you who believe! Remember Allah abundantly* in the sense of cause and effect. If you remember God abundantly, He will remember you with His mercy copiously, and take you from darkness into light. Furthermore, from this, it can be understood that *darkness* here is the darkness of forgetfulness and heedlessness of God, whereas *light* is the light of remembrance of God.

And He is merciful towards the faithful: There is a shift in person here. It says "towards the faithful" instead of "towards you" to emphasise that it is faith which triggers His mercy.

تَحِيَّتُهُمْ يَوْمَ يَلْقَوْنَهُۥ سَلَٰمٌ ۚ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَرِيمًا ﴿٤٤﴾

(33:44) ***Their greeting*** **(taḥiyyatuhum)** ***on the day they meet Him shall be peace, and He has prepared for them a generous reward.***

Taḥiyyatuhum (Their greeting) is a verbal noun with a pronoun (*-hum*) appended to it and is an implied construction in the passive voice, meaning that they will be greeted with "peace" by the angels and before their Lord. That is, on the day they encounter them, they will enjoy safety and security; nothing shall vex them, and punishment shall not touch them.

And He has prepared for them a generous reward: Meaning, God has prepared for them a handsome recompense.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

(33:45) ***O Prophet! We sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.***

The Prophet is described as a *witness* because he bears witness to the deeds [of people, or of the *ummah*] in this world and reports them on the Day of Resurrection, as mentioned in the verse *that you may be witnesses over the people and that the Messenger may be a witness over you* (2:143), as well as other verses referring to the Prophet as the foremost witness.

Bearer of glad tidings and warner means that he gives good news of divine reward and Paradise to the faithful who obey God and His Messenger, and he warns the faithless and disobedient of divine punishment and the Fire.

وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا ﴿٤٦﴾

(33:46) ***As someone calling to Allah—by His permission—and as a lamp spreading light.***

Calling to Allah means that he calls the people to believe in God alone; as a corollary, this must include faith in the religion of God. *By His permission* refers to his being formally appointed as a prophet [that is, the *biʿthah*].

As a lamp spreading light is metaphorical; it means that he guides the people to their true happiness and saves them from the darkness of misery and misguidance. Some exegetes say that the *shining light* is the Qur'an and it means that it is like a shining light; however, this is rather distant from the text.

وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِأَنَّ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَضْلًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٤٧﴾

(33:47) ***Give glad tidings to the believers that they shall have a great grace*** **(faḍlan)** ***from Allah.***

Faḍl ("grace", also "leftover" or "extra") bespeaks of whatever a person is given beyond what they have earned or deserve, as in:

Whoever brings one good deed, We shall reward that person with ten of the like. (6:160)

They shall have whatever they desire there, and with Us is even more. (50:35)

This demonstrates that the divine reward is not merely in proportion to a deed; rather, it is a form of grace beyond that. Nothing in the verse specifies that this is only in the Hereafter.

وَلَا تُطِعِ الْكَافِرِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَدَعْ أَذَاهُمْ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿٤٨﴾

(33:48) ***Obey not the faithless and the hypocrites. Heed not their annoyances, and trust in Allah; Allah suffices as a protector.***

The meaning of *obey*, *faithless*, and *hypocrites* was explained at the beginning of this sūrah.

Heed not their annoyances: Meaning, turn away from whatever annoys you and do not concern yourself with it. Evidence for this interpretation is found in *trust in Allah*, meaning, do not go at it alone when repulsing their intrusions; rather, make God your protector in that, and God suffices as a protector.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of naration from Ibn al-Qādiḥ that Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣadiq] said:
Everything has a boundary that it finishes at, except for *dhikr* (the remembrance of God), for *dhikr* has no end. God, the Mighty and Glorious, ordained certain religious duties; once they have been performed, they come to an end. Fasting the month of Ramaḍān and performing the hajj both have an end; whoever fasts the month of Ramaḍān reaches its end, and whoever performs the

hajj reaches its end [that is, these acts conclude at the end of the month of Ramaḍān and the end of the season of hajj]. However, *dhikr* is endless, for God, the Mighty and Glorious, was not content with *dhikr* to be done in a small amount; therefore, he did not set any limit for it.

O you who believe! Remember Allah abundantly, and glorify Him morntide and eventide (33:41-42). God did not set any finish line for *dhikr*.

My father [Imām al-Bāqir] used to remember God abundantly. When I walked with him, he would remember God. When I ate with him, he would remember God. He used to ask people what was distracting them from the remembrance of God. I used to see his tongue held fast to the top of his mouth, saying: "There is no god but God!"[1] He used to gather us to remember God until the sun rose. He would order those of us who could recite to recite, and those of us who could not recite to do *dhikr*.

A house in which the Qur'an is recited and God is remembered in is full of blessings. The angels come to it, and the *shayāṭīn* leave it. It shines for the inhabitants of the heavens like a star shines for the inhabitants of the earth. A house in which the Qur'an is not recited and God is not remembered has few blessings. The angels leave it, and the *shayāṭīn* come to it.

The Messenger of God said, "Shall I tell you what the best of your deeds is? The one that will elevate you the most and will purify you before your true sovereign? The one that is better for you than dinars and dirhams, and the one that is better for you than if you were to encounter your enemy, slay and be slain?"

The said, "Yes."

He said, "Remembering God, the Mighty and Glorious, abundantly."

Once, a man came to the Prophet and asked, "Who is the best person at the mosque?"

He said, "The one who remembers God the most."

The Messenger of God said, "Whoever has been gifted a tongue

1 The phrase "there is no god but God (*lā ilāha illa Allāh*)" comprises mostly of the letter l, which is formed by the tongue being held against the top of the palate. (Trans.)

which remembers God has been given a great good in tthis world and in the afterlife."

Regarding *and bestow not favours that you may receive again with increase* (74:6), he said, "Do not regard any good act you have done for the sake of God as something big."

In the same book, Abū al-Muʿizzī relates without a further chain of narration:

The Commander of the Faithful said: "Whoever remembers God secretly has remembered God abundantly. The hypocrites remember God openly but do not remember God secretly. God, the Mighty and Glorious, said: *They do it [pray] to be seen by people, and they but remember Allah little* (4:142)."

Author's comments: This is an elegant application of this verse.

(2) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is related from Zayd al-Shaḥām:

Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said, "The severest trial a believer can endure is being deprived of three traits."

He was asked, "What are they?"

He said, " Sharing his wealth with others out of sympathy, being fair towards others regarding himself, and remembering God abundantly. However, by this, I do not mean just reciting *subḥān Allāh wal-ḥamdu lillāh wa lā ilāha illā Allāh wa Allāhu akbar*,[1] even though this is a type of *dhikr*; rather, it means remembrance of God in the face of what He has permitted and prohibited."

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī, and al-Bayhaqī relate from Abu Saʿīd al-Khudrī:

The Messenger of God was asked which servants of God have the higest degree with Him on the Day of Resurrection.

He said, "Those who remember God abundantly."

I said, "O Messenger of God, what about those to go to battle for the sake of God?"

He said, "Even if he fought the faithless and the idolaters with his sword until it broke and he was drenched in blood, those

1 "Exalted be God, and praise be to God, and there is no god but God, and God is the greatest," something which could be recited repeatedly as a form of *dhikr*. (Trans.)

who remember God abundantly would still have a higher level than him."

(4) In *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi*, it is related via a chain of narration from ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan from his father from his grandfather al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī:
A group of Jews came to the Messenger of God, and the most learned of them asked him a question.
One of their questions was, "Why are you called Muḥammad, Aḥmad, Abū al-Qāsim, *bashīr* (bringer of glad tidings), *nadhīr* (warner), and *dāʿī* (caller)?"
He said, "*Dāʿī*: because I call the people to the way (*dīn*) of their Lord, the Mighty and Glorious. *Nadhīr*: because I warn anyone who disobeys me about the Fire. *Bashīr*: because I give glad tidings of Paradise to whomever obeys me."

(5) *Tafsir al-Qummī* says regarding verses 33:45-48 (*O Prophet! We sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner… Allah suffices as a protector*):
These were revealed in Mecca five years before the migration to Medina.

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Verses 49-62

These verses contain various legal rulings, some of which are specific to the Prophet and his wives, and others of which are general.

Commentary

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نَكَحْتُمُ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمَسُّوهُنَّ فَمَا لَكُمْ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ عِدَّةٍ تَعْتَدُّونَهَا ۖ فَمَتِّعُوهُنَّ وَسَرِّحُوهُنَّ سَرَاحًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٤٩﴾

(33:49) ***O you who believe! If you marry*** **(nakaḥtum)** ***believing women and then divorce them before touching them*** **(tamassūhunna)*****, you do not have to reckon a waiting-period*** **(ʿiddah)** ***for them. Provide*** **(mattiʿūhunna)** ***for them and set them free kindly*** **(sarriḥūhunna sarāḥan jamīlan).**

Nakaḥtum, from *nikāḥ*, here means "reciting the marriage contract".[1] *Touching (*tamassūhunna*)* here means "consummating the marriage".[2] *Provide (*mattiʿūhunna*)* means "giving them a settlement of wealth appropriate to their situation and social standing". *Set them free kindly* (sarriḥūhunna sarāḥan jamīlan) means "to divorce them without animosity".

The verse means: If you divorce a woman after reciting the marriage contract but before consummation, they do not have to undergo any waiting-period (*ʿiddah*) for divorce. You must give them a divorce settlement and release them kindly.

The verse applies in all cases, whether or not a dowry (*mahr*) was specified for the wife when the marriage contract was recited. It is clarified

1 Perhaps ʿAllāmah made this clarification since in some cultures today, *nikāḥ* is used in the sense of consummating a marriage. (Trans.)

2 That is, touching is a euphemism for consummation, not just any sort of touch. (Trans.)

by this verse: *and if you divorce them before touching them and have already set a dowry, then you must give them half of the agreed-upon dowry* (2:237). If a dowry was not specified, this verse indicates that something must still be given to the woman being divorced.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَحْلَلْنَا لَكَ أَزْوَاجَكَ اللَّاتِي آتَيْتَ أُجُورَهُنَّ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ
يَمِينُكَ مِمَّا أَفَاءَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ وَبَنَاتِ عَمِّكَ وَبَنَاتِ عَمَّاتِكَ وَبَنَاتِ
خَالِكَ وَبَنَاتِ خَالَاتِكَ اللَّاتِي هَاجَرْنَ مَعَكَ وَامْرَأَةً مُؤْمِنَةً إِنْ وَهَبَتْ
نَفْسَهَا لِلنَّبِيِّ إِنْ أَرَادَ النَّبِيُّ أَنْ يَسْتَنْكِحَهَا خَالِصَةً لَكَ مِنْ دُونِ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۗ قَدْ عَلِمْنَا مَا فَرَضْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِي أَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ
لِكَيْلَا يَكُونَ عَلَيْكَ حَرَجٌ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٥٠﴾

(33:50) ***O Prophet! We have made lawful to you your wives whom you have given their dowries to, and those whom your right hand possesses out of those whom Allah has given to you as prisoners of war, and the daughters of your paternal uncles and the daughters of your paternal aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and the daughters of your maternal aunts who fled with you; and a believing woman if she gifts herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desires to marry her—specially for you, not for the [other] believers. We know what We have ordained for them concerning their wives and those whom their right hands possess so that there may be no difficulty for you; and Allah is forgiving, merciful.***

In this verse, God tells the Prophet that seven groups of women are lawful to him:

His wives whom he had given their dowries (*ujūr*) to. *Ujūr* means *muhūr* (pl. of *mahr*, a dowry paid to the bride). As a condition, the Prophet must have already given them their dowries.

Those whom your right hand possesses out of those whom Allah has given to you as prisoners of war, meaning female captives of war who were taken as part of the *ghanāʾim* or *anfāl* and who are in his possession. The conditions outlined for this and the previous group (that is, the wives to whom he had already given their dowries, and that the women were taken by the Muslims as prisoners are war) are for further explanation,

not restriction.

The daughters of your paternal uncles. (See below.)

The daughters of your paternal aunts. Some exegetes say that this and the above mean the women of the Quraysh tribe.

The daughters of your maternal uncles. (See below.)

The daughters of your maternal aunts who fled with you. Some exegetes say that this and the above mean the women of the Banū Zuhrah clan. Regarding *who fled with you*, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says, "This [verse was revealed] during the time when the Prophet was not allowed to marry women who had not migrated [to Medina]; however, it later became allowed for the Prophet to marry women who had not migrated [to Medina]."

A believing woman if she gifts herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desires to marry her: That is, a Muslim woman who cedes herself to the Prophet, meaning that she is happy for him to marry her without any dowry or bride-gift (*ṣidāq* or *mahr*). God allows him to marry her if he wanted to.

Specially for you, not for the [other] believers: This indicates that this ruling about a woman who cedes herself to the Prophet is specifically for him and not anyone else.[1] The subsequent phrase—*We know what We have ordained for them concerning their wives and those whom their right hands possess*—emphasizes that these rulings are specific to the Prophet only.

So that there may be no difficulty for you; and Allah is forgiving, merciful: This provides a *raison d'être* for the beginning of the verse (*We have made lawful to you…*). Alternatively, it could also explain the rationale behind the latter part of the verse—that is, why these strictures are only for the Prophet and no one else; however, this interpretation is less likely. The verse concludes with mention of God's forgiveness and mercy.

تُرْجِي مَنْ تَشَاءُ مِنْهُنَّ وَتُؤْوِي إِلَيْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۖ وَمَنِ ابْتَغَيْتَ مِمَّنْ
عَزَلْتَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكَ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ تَقَرَّ أَعْيُنُهُنَّ وَلَا يَحْزَنَّ
وَيَرْضَيْنَ بِمَا آتَيْتَهُنَّ كُلُّهُنَّ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ ۚ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا
حَلِيمًا ﴿٥١﴾

1 That is, all other men must pay their wives dowries. (Trans.)

(33:51) ***You may put off*** **(turjī)** ***whichever of them you please, and you may take to yourself*** **(tuʾwī)** ***whichever of them you please, and whom you desire of those whom you had set aside, there is no blame upon you. Thus it is likelier that they may be comforted and that they will not grieve, and that they should all be pleased with what you have given them. Allah knows what is in your hearts, and Allah is knowing, forbearing.***

Turjī means "to put off" or "to delay". Here, it is a polite way of saying "reject". *Tuʾwī* means "to lodge in a place" or "to give a home to". Here, it is a figure of speech meaning "accepting", "embracing", and "drawing towards one's self". The context indicates that this expression means that the Prophet is free to accept or reject a woman who gifts herself to the Prophet.

Whom you desire **(man ibtaghayta)** ***of those whom you had set aside:*** *Ibtaghayta* means "to seek"; that is, seeking the ones whom he had initially rejected as a wife. *There is no blame* on him for agreeing to marry them after initially rejecting them since he is allowed to either accept or reject them.

Possibly, this verse can also be understood to mean that the Prophet may divide his time among his wives as he wishes. Rather than adhering to a strict rotation through which he spends the night at the house of one of his wives, then the next, he may hasten or delay the turn of a wife. He may also stay apart from one for a while, then return to her after some time. This sits better with the next part of the verse (*Thus it is likelier that they may be comforted and that they will not grieve, and that they should all be pleased with what you have given them. Allah knows what is in your hearts*). That is, it would bring happiness to the one whose turn was hastened and bring hope to the one whose turn was delayed.

Allah is knowing, forbearing: Meaning that God knows what is best for His servants, and He does not hasten punishment.

Exegetes have put forward various other views about the verse. The ones we have presented are the ones which fit best with the context of verses surrounding it as well as the narrations from Ahl al-Bayt, which shall be discussed in the section on narrations.

لَا يَحِلُّ لَكَ النِّسَاءُ مِنْ بَعْدُ وَلَا أَنْ تَبَدَّلَ بِهِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ

حُسْنُهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا مَلَكَتْ يَمِينُكَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رَقِيبًا ﴿٥٢﴾

(33:52) ***It is not permissible for you to take women afterwards, nor exchange them for other wives, even if their beauty entrances you, except for what your right hand possesses. And Allah watches over all things.***

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If this verse is taken independently, without reference to the preceding or succeeding verses, it means that the Prophet is not allowed to be married to any women other than the ones who chose to remain with him rather than divorce him [see 33:28-29]. The injunction that he cannot divorce a wife and marry another in her stead reinforces that.

If the verse is understood as part of the sequence of verses that came before it (beginning with *We have made lawful to you…*), it indicates that the Prophet may not marry any women apart from those in the six groups that were specified.[1]

Some narrations from the Imāms indicate that the verse is referring to the groups of women who are forbidden to marry in Qur'an 4:23 (*Forbidden to you are your mothers and your daughters…*).

It is not permissible for you to take women afterwards: Depending on which of the three above interpretations is adopted, it means either: (a) after the nine wives of the Prophet chose to remain with the Prophet instead of divorcing him; (b) other than the groups mentioned in 33:50; or (c) other than the women prohibited for marriage in 4:23.

Nor exchange them for other wives: Meaning to divorce one or more wives and marry others in their stead.

Except for what your right hand possesses: Meaning slave-girls; this is an exception to *it is not permissible for you to take women afterwards*.

And Allah watches over all things: The meaning of this is apparent. This expression also conveys a veiled threat [along the lines of, "God sees all, so abide by His rules"].[2]

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1 That is, the six groups of women specified in 33:50. Six groups are mentioned, rather than seven, because "what your right hand possesses" is still identified as permissible here. (Trans.)

2 ᶜAllāmah does not specify whom the threat is directed towards, but given that he strongly supports the view that the Prophet was sinless, and hence not in need of a divine warning, one might presume that he means that the

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَىٰ طَعَامٍ
غَيْرَ نَاظِرِينَ إِنَاهُ وَلَٰكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا
وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي مِنْكُمْ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ ۚ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ
حِجَابٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْذُوا
رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تَنْكِحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكُمْ كَانَ عِنْدَ
اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا ﴿٥٣﴾

(33:53) ***O you who believe! Do not enter the houses of the Prophet unless permission is given to you for a meal. Do not sit and stare at the pot. When you are invited, enter, and after you have eaten, leave; do not wait around listening to talk. This troubles the Prophet, but he is shy to tell you; however, Allah is not shy from the truth. And when you ask them for some goods, ask them from behind a curtain; this is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it does not behove you that you should trouble the Messenger of Allah, nor that you should marry his wives after him ever; this is grievous in the sight of Allah.***

This verse outlines the etiquette expected of visitors to the Prophet's houses. *Unless permission is given to you* is an exception to *do not enter*. *For a meal* is part of *unless permission is given to you*. *Do not sit and stare at the pot* means do not sit around waiting for the food to cook and a pot to appear. This was said because they used to come to the Prophet's houses early and sit around for a long time waiting for the food to cook. This is clarified by *when you are invited, enter, and after you have eaten, leave*. *Do not wait around listening to talk* is linked by the conjunction *and* to the injunction *do not sit and stare at the pot* [despite not being next to it in the verse], meaning that both phrases describe things that they should not be

warning was directed at the community (including the wives of the Prophet and the Companions), urging them to accept the directives of God regarding the Prophet's private life. (Trans.)

doing.[1] That is, they should neither intentionally come early to sit around while the food is cooking, nor should they intentionally linger afterwards in order to listen to the Prophet's private conversations.

This troubles the Prophet, but he is shy to tell you: This explains why this prohibition is being delivered. Meaning, they should not hang around like that because it vexes the Prophet, but he is too embarrassed to ask them to leave. *However, Allah is not shy from the truth* declares to them that this is the truth; it tells them what vexes the Prophet and what the suitable etiquette for visiting the Prophet should be.

And when you ask them for some goods, ask them from behind a curtain; this is purer for your hearts and their hearts: *Them* (*-hunna*) refers to the wives of the Prophet. "Asking them for goods" is a figure of speech meaning "asking them for something they need"; that is, if they need something, they should ask the wives of the Prophet for it from behind a curtain. *This is purer for your hearts and their hearts* explains the reasoning behind this ruling.

And it does not behove you that you should trouble the Messenger of Allah, nor that you should marry his wives after him ever: Meaning that it is not your place to trouble the Prophet by violating what you have been commanded regarding his wives and other matters. Furthermore, no one may marry his wives after him. Marrying his wives would be an enormity before God. This verse suggests that some people were already slipping hints that they would marry the Prophet's wives [after the Prophet died]. This is also mentioned in narrations.

إِنْ تُبْدُوا شَيْئًا أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٥٤﴾

(33:54) ***Whether you do a thing openly or secretly—Allah knows all things.***

The meaning of this is clear. In truth, it is a threat directed at those who were vexing the Prophet or bragging they would marry his wives after him.

لَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِنَّ فِي آبَائِهِنَّ وَلَا أَبْنَائِهِنَّ وَلَا إِخْوَانِهِنَّ وَلَا أَبْنَاءِ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ وَلَا أَبْنَاءِ أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ وَلَا نِسَائِهِنَّ وَلَا مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ

1 ᶜAllāmah is saying that, grammatically speaking, both phrases are in the construction of a *ḥāl*. (Trans.)

وَاتَّقِينَ اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدًا ﴿٥٥﴾

(33:55) ***There is no blame upon them regarding their fathers, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, or what their right hands possess. Be mindful of Allah; Allah witnesses all things.***

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The pronoun *them* (-hunna) refers to the wives of the Prophet. The verse provides exceptions to those who are told to consult the wives of the Prophet from behind a curtain. Their fathers, sons, brothers, nephews, and other *maḥram*s are exempted from this rule. Some exegetes say that the wives' uncles (maternal or paternal) are not mentioned here because they might describe the wives of the Prophet to their sons.[1]

It says *their women* rather than just *women* to indicate that it refers only to believing women, not disbelieving (*kāfir*) women. This is similar to how the expression *their women* is used in Qur'an 24:31. *What their right hands possess* refers to male or female slaves, who are also exempted from this rule.

Be mindful of Allah; Allah witnesses all things: This emphases the ruling, particularly since there is a shift in person from the third person feminine plural [speaking about the wives of the Prophet] to the second person feminine plural [speaking directly to the wives of the Prophet].

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إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ ۚ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا ﴿٥٦﴾

(33:56) ***Allah and His angels bless*** **(yuṣallūn)** ***the Prophet. O faithful, invoke blessings upon him and greetings of peace!***

As was mentioned previously [in the discussion of 33:43], *yuṣallūn* (from *ṣalāt*) has the root meaning of "to incline" or "to bow". When God performs *ṣalāt* on the Prophet, it means that God inclines towards the Prophet mercifully. In this verse, this mercy is unconditional and not dependent on anything else.[2] Similarly, when the angels perform *ṣalāt*

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1 This is because the wives of the Prophet are not *maḥram* to their cousins (that is, marriage is not forbidden between them and their cousins). (Trans.)

2 Whereas, in 33:43, it was conditional on the faithful remembering God. (Trans.)

on the Prophet, they purify him and pray for his forgiveness. When the faithful perform *ṣalāt* on him, it means that they pray for God's mercy to engulf him.

The *ṣalāt* of God and the angels is mentioned before the *ṣalāt* of the faithful to show that the *ṣalāt* of the faithful depends on God and the angels and cannot precede it [because they are praying to God that He bless the Prophet].

Many Shiʿi and Sunni narrations say that the way that the faithful should perform *ṣalāt* upon the Prophet is by asking God to bless him and his family.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا مُهِينًا ﴿٥٧﴾

(33:57) ***Allah has cursed those who annoy Allah and His Messenger in this world and in the hereafter, and has prepared for them a humiliating punishment.***

Obviously, none can truly annoy God, for God is above such things. God is above being irked, or anything else that might imply any failing in or splotch on His divinity. Therefore, both God and the Prophet are described as being "annoyed" as a gesture of respect towards the Prophet. Furthermore, whoever wishes ill towards God's Messenger should know that the Messenger is but a messenger of His Lord; therefore, whoever wishes ill towards the Prophet is also wishing ill towards his Lord.

They have been cursed in this world and the next. "Cursing" means distancing someone from God's mercy; God's mercy is specifically for the faithful, and comprises of guidance towards true beliefs and true faith, which inspire righteous deeds. Therefore, being distanced from mercy in this world means being deprived of this guidance as a result of their misconduct. This goes back to the concept of sealing the heart, as in:

We have cursed them and made their hearts hard. (5:13)

But Allah has cursed them for their unbelief, and they shall not believe, apart from a few. (4:46)

They are those whom Allah has cursed; He has struck them deaf and blind. (47:23)

Being cursed in the hereafter means being distanced from the mercy of being near to God, as it says in:

Nay! On that day, they shall be veiled from their Lord. (83:15)

Then it threatens them with a humiliating punishment—in the hereafter, of course. The punishment is "humiliating" because, in this world, their arrogance led them to antagonize God and His Messenger. Therefore, they will be greeted in the afterlife with punishment that will debase them.

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وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْذُونَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ بِغَيْرِ مَا اكْتَسَبُوا فَقَدِ احْتَمَلُوا بُهْتَانًا وَإِثْمًا مُبِينًا ﴿٥٨﴾

(33:58) ***Those who vex [or slander] the faithful men and women undeservedly bear upon themselves defamation and a glaring sin.***

This is qualified by the phrase *undeservedly*, meaning that there is no cause for them to be vexed. It does not include cases where there is just cause to put someone to discomfort, such as legal retribution (*qiṣāṣ*), punishment (*ḥadd*), or discretionary punishment by a judge (*taʿdhīr*); there is no blame in these cases.

However, insofar as they are harassing the faithful without just cause, God decrees that they shall bear [the consequences] of committing slander and a glaring sin. Slander (*buhtān*) is lying about someone else in front of their face [as opposed to gossiping about them in secret]. Harassing the faithful is equated with slander since they are harassed face-to-face, where the harassing individual considers this to be a reason for themselves and asks 'why the faithful had said this or done that?' when in reality this is just an accusation of misconduct and is not in itself a misconduct of the faithful.

It is considered a glaring sin because it is defamation, and the intellect understands that defamation is a misdeed; one does not need shariah to tell them that.

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يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٥٩﴾

(33:59) O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the faithful women to let down upon themselves their cloaks **(jalābībihinna).** ***Thus it is likelier that they will be known and not troubled. Allah is forgiving, merciful.***

Jalābīb is the plural of *jilbāb*, meaning a cloak which a woman wraps herself with and which covers her entire body. Or it can mean a *khimār* (headpiece) which covers her head and face.

To let down upon themselves their cloaks: Meaning, to cover themselves with them so that their chests and bosoms are hidden from onlookers.

Thus it is likelier that they will be known and not troubled: Meaning, if they cover their entire body, it is more likely that they will be identified as "people of covering and righteousness" (*ahl al-sitr wa al-ṣalāḥ*) and will not be harassed by the hypocrites.

Some exegetes say that the clause, *thus it is likelier that they will be known* means that they will be recognized as free Muslim women; therefore, they will not be approached as if they are slave-girls or non-Muslims (for instance, among the People of the Book or others). However, the view that we first mentioned fits better.

لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْمُرْجِفُونَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ لَنُغْرِيَنَّكَ بِهِمْ ثُمَّ لَا يُجَاوِرُونَكَ فِيهَا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٦٠﴾

(33:60) ***If the hypocrites and those with sick hearts and the agitators* (murjafūn) *in the city do not desist* (yantahī), *We shall certainly spur you against them* (la-nughriyannaka bihim). *Then they shall only remain your neighbors for a short time.***

Yantahī means to stop doing something. The *murjafūn* are those who spread false slander to upset someone or to incite unrest. *Nughriannaka* means "to spur against".

It means: "I swear, if the hypocrites and sick-hearted people—and those who are spreading false rumours throughout the city to provoke unrest among the Muslims—do not stop their sedition, We shall spur you against them. Then, they will only remain your neighbours in a city for a short time, for they will have been banished; that 'short time' is the time between the issuing of the edict [of banishment] and the enactment of the decree."

مَلْعُونِينَ ۖ أَيْنَمَا ثُقِفُوا أُخِذُوا وَقُتِّلُوا تَقْتِيلًا ﴿٦١﴾

(33:61) ***Cursed: wherever they are found* (thuqifū), *they shall be seized and slain.***

Thuqifū is the passive form of *thaqafa*, meaning "to become aware of and capture".[1] The clauses is an adverbial phrase (*ḥāl*) describing the *hypocrites*, *those with sick hearts*, and *the agitators* [mentioned in the previous verse]. It means that their condition is such that they are cursed; wherever they are found, they are taken and unilaterally slain.

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سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا ﴿٦٢﴾

(33:62) ***This was the way* (sunnah) *of Allah with respect to those who went before, and you shall not find any change in the way of Allah.***

Sunnah means "a path that is usually or always trodden".

God says: "We have threatened these hypocrites, insurgents, and agitators with punishment—exile and execution—the same way We did to the ancients. This has been the way of God. Whenever some people worked corruption, incited civil unrest, or became lawless or tyrannical, We seized them. You shall not find any change in the way of God. This shall be enacted among you as it was among the ancients."

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Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *if you marry believing women and then divorce them before touching them…* (33:49), it is related in *al-Faqīh* from ᶜAmr ibn Shimr from Jābir that Imām al-Bāqir said:
Provide for them (matiᶜūhunna) means to treat them as handsomely as is within your capacity, for they are leaving sadly and forlornly, with great distress and subject to the gossiping of their enemies. For God is generous and bashful, and loves those who are bashful; the noblest of you are those who are the most generous to their wives.

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from al-Ḥalabī from Imām al-Ṣādiq regarding a man who divorces his wife before the marriage is consummated:
He must pay her half of the dowry (*mahr*) if it was specified. If it was not specified, then he should give her something along the

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1 Or just "find". (Trans.)

lines of what similar women would receive.

Author's comments: There are many narrations expressing this meaning. They clarify the meaning of this verse with respect to the verse in Sūrat al-Baqarah, as was mentioned in the exegesis of that verse [2:237].

(3) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd from Ḥabīb ibn Thābit:
A man came to ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn and asked him about a man who says, "If I marry so-and-so, I will divorce her." [For instance, can he marry her?]
He replied, "What he says [about divorce] is meaningless, since, according to God, marriage comes before divorce. God says: *O you who believe! If you marry believing women and then divorce them before touching them…* (33:49)."

Author's comments: This is also related in *Majmaʿ* from Ḥabīb ibn Thābit from him [Imām al-Sajjad].

(4) It is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Ibn Mājah and Ibn Mardawayh from al-Miswar ibn Makhramah that the Prophet said:
Divorce cannot happen before a marriage, and a person cannot be freed before they are enslaved.

Author's comments: A similar narration has been related from him from Jābir and ʿĀʾishah.

(5) Regarding *O Prophet! We have made lawful to you your wives…* (33:50), in *al-Kāfī* it is related from Imām al-Bāqir (via chain of narration from al-Ḥaḍramī) and Imām al-Ṣādiq (via a chain of narration from al-Ḥalabī):
Someone asked, "How many women were allowed to him?"
He [the Imām] said, "As many as he wanted."

(6) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related with a chain of narration from al-Ḥalabī:
I [al-Ḥalabī] said, "*It is not permissible for you to take women afterwards, nor exchange them for other wives*" (33:52). [That is, he is asking what this verse means.]
He [Imām al-Ṣādiq] said, "The Messenger of God was allowed

to be married to as many wives as he wished from among his cousins,[1] in addition to his wives who migrated with him. And it was permitted for him to marry a former wife of one of the believers [whose husband had died or divorced her], and who forewent a dowry, such that she was a gift. But no one is allowed to take a wife as a gift except for the Messenger of God. Men other than the Messenger of God may only marry when they give their bride a dowry (*mahr*). This is the meaning of *and a believing woman if she gifts herself to the Prophet* (33:50).

(7) Regarding *and a believing woman…* (33:50), in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related[2] that Imām al-Sajjād said:
This refers to Um Shurayk al-Azdiyyah who gifted herself to the Prophet.

Author's comments: It is also narrated that it refers to Khawlah bint al-Ḥakīm, Laylā bint al-Khaṭīm, or Maymūna. It appears that several women gifted themselves to the Prophet.

(8) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related from Muḥammad ibn Qays that Imām al-Bāqir said:
A woman from the Anṣār came to the Messenger of God and said, "O Messenger of God, women do not usually propose to men. However, I have been a single woman with no husband for a long time, and I have no children. Do you have any need [of me]? If so, I will gift myself to you, if you will accept me."
The Messenger of God replied to her kindly and prayed for her. Then he said, "O, sister from the Anṣār! May God reward all of you [Anṣār] with goodness from His Messenger, for your men have aided me, and your women have sought me."
Ḥafṣah said, "How shameless and bold you are, to be chasing after men!"
The Messenger of God said, "Leave her alone, Ḥafṣah. She is

1 The narration specifies that they include the daughters of his father's brother, the daughters of his father's sisters, the daughters of his mother's brother, and the daughters of his mother's sisters. (Trans.)

2 It is related from Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Abī Shaybah, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, and al-Ṭabarāni.

better than you. She sought the Messenger of God, whereas you are criticizing her for that."
Then he said to the woman, "Go, may God have mercy upon you, for God has ordained Paradise for you for seeking me, since you presented yourself as a gift to me out of love for me and a desire for my happiness. My response shall come to you, if God wills."
Then, God sent down *and a believing woman if she gifts herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desires to marry her—specially for you, not for the [other] believers* (33:50). So God, the Mighty and Glorious, allowed her to gift herself that to the Prophet, although He did not allow that for other men.

(9) *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says:
It is said that when she gifted herself to the Prophet, ʿĀʾishah said, "What ails these women who offer themselves without any dowry in exchange?"
So this verse was revealed.
ʿĀʾishah said, "It seems to me that God is rushing to fulfill your whims."
The Messenger of God said, "If you obeyed God, He would rush to fulfil your whims."

(10) Regarding *You may put off whichever of them you please, and you may take to yourself whichever of them you please* (33:51), *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* says that Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq said:
Those who were "put off" were the ones whom he did not marry, and those whom he "took to himself" were those whom he did marry.

(11) Regarding *it is not permissible for you to take women afterwards* (33:52), in *al-Kāfī*, with a chain of narration from al-Ḥaḍramī, it is related from Imām al-Bāqīr:
This means that it was not permissible for him to marry the women whom God had forbidden people to marry in the verse *forbidden to you are your mothers and daughters…and sisters and paternal and maternal aunts…* (4:23). If the matter were as they [others] claim, you would have been allowed to do what he was

forbidden, because any of you can replace one wife with another as often as you like. However, the command here is not as people say it is. God, the Mighty and Glorious, permitted the Prophet to marry any women that he liked except for those who were prohibited in the verse in Sūrat al-Nisāʾ.

(12) Regarding the verse *nor exchange them for other wives* (33:52), in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related[1] via a chain of narration from ʿAli ibn Zayd:
Al-Ḥasan said, "God limited his wives to the nine whom he left behind as widows."
ʿAli ibn Zayd continued:
ʿAli ibn al-Ḥusayn said, "If he had wanted, he would have married others."
The wording of the narration from ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd is: "He also could have married other women."

(13) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:
Regarding the verse *O you who believe! Do not enter the houses of the Prophet unless permission is given to you…* (33:53)—this was [revealed] after the Messenger of God had married Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. He loved her and hosted a wedding-banquet (*walīmah*) for her and invited his companions. After his companions had finished eating, they wanted to stay around and chat with the Messenger of God, whereas he wanted to be alone with Zaynab. Therefore, God revealed this.
Unless permission is given to you… from behind a curtain. (33:53)
God, the Mighty and Glorious, revealed this because they used to barge in without permission.

Author's comments: A more detailed version of this story is related from Anas via various chains of narration.

(14) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Ibn Saʿd from Ṣāliḥ ibn Kaysān:
The Prophet installed a curtain (*ḥijāb*) in front of his wives in

1 It is related from ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

the month of Dhū al-Qaʿdah in the fifth year after the migration.

Author's comments: This is also narrated by Ibn Saʿd from Anas. It also says that this was the year that the Prophet married Zaynab.

(15) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, regarding *and it does not behove you that you should trouble the Messenger of Allah* (33:53), Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates from al-Siddī:
We heard that Ṭālḥah ibn ʿUbayd Allāh said, "Muḥammad is putting a curtain (*ḥijāb*) between ourselves and our cousins? And he can marry our wives after us? If he has said this, then let us marry his wives after him." So this verse was revealed.

Author's comments: This has been related in other narrations. Some say that he wanted to marry ʿĀʾishah and Um Salamah.

(16) In *Thawāb al-Aʿmāl*, it is related from Abu al-Muʿizzī:
I said, "What is the meaning of the *ṣalāt* of God, the angels, and the faithful?"
He [Abū al-Ḥasan] said, "The *ṣalāt* of God is mercy from God. The *ṣalāt* of the angels is their purification of a person. And the *ṣalāt* of the *faithful* is their prayers for a person."

(17) In *al-Khiṣāl*, it is related from the Commander of the Faithful [Imām ʿAlī] in the "Hadith on Four Hundred Traits":
Send blessings upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad, for when you recite *Allah and His angels bless the Prophet* (33:56), God accepts your prayers as well as your prayers for him [and your observance of his right/and protects you for his sake]. So send blessings upon him during your ritual prayers or at other times.

(18) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Kaʿb ibn ʿAjrah:[1]
A man said, "O Messenger of God. We understand how to send peace (*salām*) upon you. But how should we send *ṣalāt* upon you?"

1 It is related from ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Mājah, and Ibn Mardawayh from Kaʿb ibn ʿAjrah.

He said, "Say, 'O God, bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad like You blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham; You are praiseworthy, glorious. O God, grace Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad like you graced Abraham and the family of Abraham; You are praiseworthy, glorious."[1]

Author's comments: *Al-Durr al-Manthūr* mentions eighteen other Sunni narrations indicating that the family of the Prophet should be mentioned when sending *ṣalāt* upon the Prophet. These narrations have been related from various companions, including Ibn ʿAbbās, Ṭalḥah, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Abū Hurayrah, Abū Masʿūd al-Anṣārī, Buraydah, Ibn Masʿūd, Kaʿb ibn ʿAjrah, and ʿAlī. The Shiʿi narrations saying this are beyond count.

(19) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related from Aḥmad and al-Tirmidhī from al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī that the Messenger of God said:
A stingy person is one when I am mentioned to him, he does not send blessings (*ṣalāt*) upon me.

(20) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says regarding the verse *O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the faithful women to let down upon themselves their cloaks…* (33:59):
This verse was revealed because women used to go to the mosque and pray behind the Messenger of God. When night came and they would go for the evening and night prayers, some young men would wait for them along the footpaths and harass them. So God revealed this verse.

(21) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, it is related[2] that Um Salamah said:
After this verse was revealed (*to let down upon themselves their cloaks…*, 33:59), when the women from the Anṣar came outside, it was as if there were crows perched atop their heads due to the black garments they were wearing.

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1 *Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammadin wa ʿalā āl-i Muḥammad kamā ṣallayta ʿalā Ibrāhīm wa āl-i Ibrāhim; innaka ḥamīdun majīd. Allāhumma bārik ʿalā Muḥammadin wa ʿalā āl-i Muḥammadin kamā bārakta ʿalā Ibrāhīm wa āl-i Ibrāhīm innaka ḥamīdun majīd.* (Trans.)

2 It is related from ʿAbd al-Razzāq, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh.

(22) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related regarding the verse *if the hypocrites and those with sick hearts and the agitators in the city do not desist…* (33:60):

This was revealed regarding a group of the hypocrites in Medina who used to spread lies about the Messenger of God whenever he went out to battle. They would say, "He has been killed, and the Muslims have been taken captive!" For that reason, they complained to the Messenger of God, and God, the Mighty and Glorious, revealed regarding that: *If the hypocrites and those with sick hearts and the agitators in the city do not desist, We shall certainly spur you against them. Then they shall only remain your neighbors for a short time* (or *apart from a few,* illā qalīl[an], 33:60)—meaning, "We command you to expel them from Medina, apart from a few."[1]

Cursed: wherever they are found, they shall be seized and slain (33:61). A narration from Abū al-Jārūd says that Imām al-Bāqir said:

Cursed (*malʿūnīn*)—curse after curse was decreed for them at the behest of God.

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1 This narration interprets *illā qalīlan* in the verse to mean "other than a few people" rather than "other than for a short time", whereas the latter is how it is understood in the previous section of the commentary. (Trans.)

Verses 63-73

These verses speak of the importance of the final hour and some of the punishment that shall befall the deniers (*kuffār*). They command the faithful to speak rightly and promise them a goodly promise. Then the sūrah finishes by mentioning the trust [offered to the heavens and the earth, *amānah*].

Commentary

يَسْأَلُكَ النَّاسُ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ ۖ قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ۚ وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ تَكُونُ قَرِيبًا ﴿٦٣﴾

(33:63) ***People are asking you about the Hour. Say: Knowledge of it is with Allah. What would make you understand that perhaps the Hour is near?***

This verse tells of how the people were asking when the final hour would come. They wanted to know when it was—whether it was far or near—as the expression "hour (*sāʿah*)" implies.[1] God commands the Prophet to tell them that God alone knows when it will fall; this is repeated throughout the Qur'an.

What would make you understand that perhaps the Hour is near? This emphasizes how unknown it is. It lets people know that the Prophet is like anyone else with respect to not knowing when it will occur. That is, it is not a secret which God revealed to the Prophet but which the Prophet hid from the mases.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَنَ الْكَافِرِينَ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ سَعِيرًا ﴿٦٤﴾

(33:64) ***Allah has cursed the deniers*** **(kuffār)** ***and prepared*** **(aʿadda)**

1 That is, the verse does not specify exactly what they were asking, but one can deduce from the fact that they are asking about the "Hour" that they are asking when it will be (whereas the same would not be said if they were asking about the "Resurrection" or some other synonym for the Day of Judgment). (Trans.)

for them a blazing fire **(saʿīr).**

By cursing the deniers (*kuffār*), God is distancing them from His mercy. *Aʿadda* means "to prepare". *Saʿīr* is a kindled, blazing fire. The rest of the verse is clear.

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خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ۖ لَا يَجِدُونَ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿٦٥﴾

(33:65) ***To abide therein forever; they shall find no protector*** **(waliyan)** ***and no helper*** **(naṣīran).**

The difference between *walī* and *naṣīr* is that a *walī* handles all of matter himself, while a *mawlā* [a person ceding a matter to a *walī*] does not take on any of it. A *naṣīr* helps a person in some aspects of a matter but does not take it all upon himself; rather, the person being assisted is still involved. So a *walī* handles a matter wholly, whereas a *naṣīr* handles it partially. The rest of the verse is clear.

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يَوْمَ تُقَلَّبُ وُجُوهُهُمْ فِي النَّارِ يَقُولُونَ يَا لَيْتَنَا أَطَعْنَا اللَّهَ وَأَطَعْنَا الرَّسُولَا ﴿٦٦﴾

(33:66) ***On the day when their faces shall mutate in the Fire. They shall say, Woe be upon us! If only we had obeyed Allah and the Messenger!***

This means that their faces will change from one form to another—for instance, turning yellow or black or gloomy. Or, it means turning them about so they are better impacted by the fire, as is done with grilled meat.

If only we had obeyed Allah and the Messenger! This is what they will say out of regret and vain hope.

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وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبَرَاءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا السَّبِيلَا ﴿٦٧﴾

(33:67) ***They shall say, O Lord! We obeyed our leaders*** **(sādatanā)** ***and great men*** **(kubarāʾanā),** ***and they misled us, away from the path!***

Sādah is the plural of *sayyid*, which—according to *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*—means "a lord, ruler, chieftain, or nobleman who looks after the affairs of a large group of people." *Kubarāʾ* is the plural of *kabīr* ("big", "great", "old").

Possibly, *kabīr* here is used in the sense of "elders", since people usually follow and obey their chieftains or their elders.

رَبَّنَا آتِهِمْ ضِعْفَيْنِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ وَالْعَنْهُمْ لَعْنًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٦٨﴾

(33:68) ***O our Lord! Double their punishment*** **(ḍiʿfayn)**, ***and curse them resoundingly!***

Ḍiʿfayn are two identical shares of a thing. They asked for these people to receive a double punishment since they misled both themselves and others. This is also why they ask God to curse them heavily.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ آذَوْا مُوسَىٰ فَبَرَّأَهُ اللَّهُ مِمَّا قَالُوا ۚ وَكَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَجِيهًا ﴿٦٩﴾

(33:69) ***O you who believe! Do not be like those who vexed Moses. Allah absolved him of what they said, and he had a position with Allah.***

This forbids them from treating their Prophet the way some of the Israelites treated their prophet, by slandering or troubling him. *Vexed* is not limited to vexation in word or in deed (although both are forbidden). However, *Allah absolved him of what they said* implies that they were slandering or defaming Moses, since one absolves a person of slander.

Possibly, the silence in this verse about how precisely they were troubling Moses supports what is mentioned in narrations—namely, that they were saying that Moses did not have what other men have [that is, he had a deficiency or defect in his male organ], so God cleared him of that; this will be discussed in the section on narrations.

Exegetes have put forward various views on how the people were troubling the Prophet. The most likely view is that this relates to what happened with Zayd and Zaynab. However, even if this be the case, many narrations relating to this story must still be discarded since they are not compatible with the sanctity and holiness of the Prophet.[1]

And he had a position with Allah: Meaning, in addition to being absolved, he had a lofty status before God. Together, this and the succeeding

1 See the discussion on 33:4 and 33:37-40, including the sections on narrations. (Trans.)

verse can be construed as a prohibition on troubling the Prophet.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا ﴿٧٠﴾

(33:70) ***O you who believe! Mind Allah, and speak rightly (sadīdan).***

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Sadīd is from the root *s-d-d* meaning "correctly" and "rightly". Speaking with *sadīd* means to speak truthfully and purposefully, with a point to what they are saying (other than gossiping or slandering). A believer should ascertain the truth of what he is saying and also ensure that it is neither vain talk nor something that would cause harm.

يُصْلِحْ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يُطِعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا ﴿٧١﴾

(33:71) ***Allah shall straighten out your deeds for you, and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has won a great victory.***

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"Straightening out your deeds" and being forgiven follow as consequences from speaking rightly. This is because a person who speaks rightly no longer lies, speaks vainly, or says something which could cause harm. As a result, once this trait of "speaking rightly" is embedded, the person must necessarily cease any sort of vulgar, depraved, abhorrent, or useless acts. Therefore, their deeds naturally become rectified, and that person naturally regrets wasting their life on sins—if, indeed, they had done anything of the sort—and regret suffices as a means for seeking repentance.

Therefore, in what remains of his life, God will protect him from falling into danger. If he commits any of the lesser sins, God will forgive him. As God says: *If you avoid the greater acts that you have been forbidden, We shall absolve you of the lesser ones* (4:31). Therefore, speaking rightly necessarily reforms a person's conduct, and causes their sins to be forgiven—through the permission of God.

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Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has won a great victory: This is a handsome promise for the future due to all their righteous deeds and avoiding forbidden things; this shall bequeath them a great victory for obeying God and His Messenger.

With this, the sūrah essentially comes to a close, since obeying God

and His Messenger was the main theme underlying the rulings (duties and prohibitions) mentioned in it. The final two verses are like a supplement to meaning of this verse.

إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا ﴿٧٢﴾ لِيُعَذِّبَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ وَيَتُوبَ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٧٣﴾

(33:72-73) ***We offered the trust* (amānah) *to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they feared it and refused it. But mankind took it; he was unjust, foolish. So Allah will punish the hypocrites, male and female, as well as the men and women who associate partners with Allah. And Allah will turn towards the male and female believers. And Allah has always been forgiving, merciful.***

A *trust* (amānah)—whatever it may be—is a thing deposited or entrusted with a person to look after; then, it is returned to the person who deposited it. This particular trust mentioned in this verse is a thing which God entrusted to human beings, with the intent that the human being would look after it safely and securely, then return it back to the One who entrusted them with it.

What is this trust?[1] From, *so Allah will punish the hypocrites, male and female*, it can be deduced that the trust was something related to hypocrisy, *shirk* (associating partners with God), and faith. Therefore, those who bear the trust are divided into groups based on how they handle the trust—hypocrites, *mushrik*s, and believers.

Doubtlessly, the trust is a matter related to the true religion (*al-dīn al-ḥaqq*), since adhering or not adhering to it qualifies a person as a hypocrite, a *mushrik*, or a believer.

So, there is a question. Is the trust (*amānah*): (a) correct belief—bearing witness to the oneness of God, (b) a combination of beliefs and acts, whereby one accepts the details of religion (but without undue

1 The headers in this section have been added by the translator. (Pub.)

attention towards how well each detail is performed), (c) carrying out the prescribed acts of the religion scrupulously, or (d) a form of perfection that a human being reaches through one of the above?

(a) *Correct belief*. It cannot be this because the heavens, earth, and other creations declare the oneness of God, and glorify and praise Him. God says: *There is no thing that does not glorify Allah* (17:44), whereas this verse makes it clear that they declined the trust.

(b) *A combination of beliefs and acts, whereby one accepts the details of religion*. It also cannot be this since the verse makes it clear that all human beings undertook the trust, whether or not they accept faith. Furthermore, it is apparent that most people have balked at accepting true faith or know nothing of it; therefore, they cannot be said to bear that responsibility.

(c) For the same reason, it is clear that the third option—*carrying out the acts of religion scrupulously*—is also not the case.

(d) *A form of perfection that a human being reaches through one of the above*. [ᶜAllāmah is now exploring what type of perfection that could be.] It cannot be a form of perfection arrived at through belief in the oneness of God, since the heavens, earth, and other creations already declare that wholly. It also cannot be a form of perfection arrived at through knowing about or accepting the true religion since, as we said previously, all human beings bear the trust, even if they be hypocrites or *mushrik*s. Furthermore, simply believing something does not lead to eternal happiness or misery; rather, it is the acts which emanate from those beliefs that have that determine their eternal future.

The view which the Author accepts: Therefore, the only remaining possibility is that the trust is something relating to true beliefs, righteous acts, and treading the path of perfection by ascending from the depths of materiality to the pinnacle of sincerity of faith in God alone.[1] It is through sincerity in faith and total submission to God where a human being does not associate with any other than God that he may reach this pinnacle. So He [God] becomes the *walī* (complete guardian, full authority) of the human being through ceding the management of one's affairs to Him; this is the divine *wilāyah* (*al-wilāyah al-ilāhiyyah*, full divine authority).

Therefore, the trust is the divine *wilāyah*. Offering it to the heavens, earth, mountains, and human beings is a figure of speech meaning

1 No other creation has this potentiality except the human being. (Pub.)

to measure or weigh them. Accepting or rejecting it is a metaphor for whether or not they had the inherent capability and facility to handle. This interpretation is acceptable because it fits with the verse. For, despite their expansiveness, power, and strength, the heavens, earth, and the mountains lack the inherent capability to bear this; this is what is meant by their rejecting it and shrinking away from it.

However, the unjust, foolish human being did not reject it or shrink away from its weight and severe danger. The human being accepted it despite that. Therefore, based on how well they handle and hold firm to this trust, human beings are divided into different groups: hypocrites, *mushrik*s, and believers. This is unlike the heavens, earth, and the mountains, since all of them are obedient and faithful.

Objection: Some might ask why a wise and omnipotent God would burden this unjust, foolish creature with a burden so perilous that—despite all their enormity and strength—the heavens, earth, and mountains all refused it. He did this while knowing that the human being is too weak to bear it, and that accepting it made him unjust and foolish, and led him into delusions and heedlessness of the consequences. With such an [in] capability to bear the trust, how could bearing it be anything but like following a leader who has gone insane? Those who are sane and rational would decline to follow such a person and would pity them for losing the ability to think straight.

Reply: While being unjust and ignorance are generally considered negative traits, they are what allow the human being to bear this trust, for a being which can be describe as unjust can also be described as just, and a being which can be described as ignorant can also be described as learned. Just as mountains can neither be called unjust nor ignorant, they can also neither be called just nor learned; the same for the heavens and the earth, unlike the human being.

The trust mentioned in the verse is divine *wilāyah* and the perfection of the attribute of servitude [towards God], which results from knowledge of God and acting rightly; this can also be called "justice". It is described through these two things—namely, knowledge and justice—insofar as the bearer of it has the capability to lack them, and be unjust and ignorant. Thus is the human being; in and of himself, he can be unjust and ignorant, but this prepares him to bear the divine burden. Understand that.

The meaning of these two verses resembles:

We created the human being in the best form; then We returned him to the lowest form, except for those who believe that do good deeds, for they shall have a reward that shall be never cut off. (95:6)

We offered the trust: Meaning the divine *wilāyah* and growing towards perfection through the truths of the truth religion in knowledge and deed. "Offering" it is a figure of speech for measuring the capability of these things to handle the trust.

To the heavens and the earth and the mountains: Meaning, to these enormous creations whose creation is greater than the creation of the human: *The creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the human.* (40:57)

But they feared it* (ashfaqna) *and refused* (abayna an yaḥmilnahā) *it: They feared to bear it and refused it due to their inherent inability to handle it; therefore, they did not accept it. The verb *yaḥmilnahā* conveys the sense of weight, in that it was too heavy for the heavens, earth, and mountains.

But mankind took it: Meaning, mankind had the inherent capacity necessary for it and was ready to accept it despite his weakness and smallness.

He was unjust, foolish: Meaning, he was unjust to himself and ignorant of the grave consequences of accepting this burden—nothing less than eternal perdition, should he betray it.

To put it more succinctly, it is because the human being is innately void of justice and knowledge but capable of accepting something that will develop these traits in himself that he can ascend from the depths of injustice and ignorance to the heights of justice and knowledge.

Unjust (ẓalūm) and *ignorant* (jahūl) are adjectives derived from *ẓulm* (injustice) and *jahl* (ignorance), respectively. They each describe the character of a person who is capable of being such, as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī says, is similar to how one might say "a fractious horse (*faras shamūs*)", "an unruly animal (*dābbah jamūh*)", or "pure water (*māʾ ṭahūr)*"; or, as others say, in this adjectival form, the meaning of each adjective ("unjust" and "ignorant") is intensified. In either case, however it is taken, the meaning is clear.

So Allah will punish* (li-yuʿadhdhib) *the hypocrites, male and female, as well as the men and women who associate partners with Allah: The *l-* at the beginning of the verse expresses a final destination. That is, it

could be that the end result of bearing the burden is that God will punish the hypocrites and *mushrik*s, male and female. For a person who betrays the trust but pretends not to is a hypocrite; few people will actually show others that they are betraying the trust. Possibly, due to this meaning, the verse mentions hypocrites before *mushrik*s.

And Allah will turn towards the male and female believers. And Allah has always been forgiving, merciful: This sentence is linked to the previous (*Allah will punish…*) with the conjunction *and*. [That is, it continues to express an end goal of bearing the burden due to the fact that *Allah will punish* was prefaced by *l-*.] It means that the end result is that God will turn mercifully towards the believers, male and female. When God "turns" [from the same root as *tawbah*] towards His servant, it means that He turns towards him with mercy. So if a person has faith and has not betrayed the trust, He will turn to him with mercy and manage his affairs, for He is the guardian (*walī*) of the believers. He will guide him towards Himself, hiding his injustice and ignorance and adorning him with useful knowledge and righteous deeds, for He is forgiving and merciful.

Objection: Some might ask why the verses cannot be understood in such a manner that the "trust" means "religious duties" (that is, "the true religion"), "bearing the trust" means "having the inherent capacity to bear it", "refusing to bear it" means "lacking the ability to bear it", and "offering" it means "measuring their capability to bear it"? Everything that was said about the verse will still be applicable here.

Reply: Yes, however, performing religious duties (*taklīf*) is a prerequisite of embracing the divine *wilāyah* and perfecting the trait of servitude towards God. Therefore, the end goal is the divine *wilayah* and perfecting the trait of servitude, not the prerequisites in and of themselves.

Although both verses are in the voice of God, the verse shifts from first to third person in, *so Allah will punish* to show that the end of all matters resides with God, the Exalted, for He is God.

And Allah will turn* (yatūba Allāh) *towards the male and female believers: There is no need [in Arabic] to specify the subject *Allah* here, since it is implied by the verb. [That is, it simply could have said *yatūba*, not *yatūba Allāh*.] However, *Allah* is repeated to emphasise His concern over their rights and His attentiveness towards their concerns.

Exegetes have put forward other views regarding the trust, such as:

(1) The "trust" refers to religious duties, the performance of which

leads a person to Paradise, and the omission of which leads a person to the Fire. "Offering the trust to the heavens, earth, and the mountains" is a way of examining whether they were ready for it; their refusing of the trust means that they were not ready for it. Conversely, when the human being bears the trust, it means that the human being was ready for it; the verses are figurative.

(2) The "trust" is the intellect, which is the foundation of the performance of religious duties, and which leads a person to either reward or punishment.

(3) The "trust" is the phrase *there is no Allah but Allah* (lā ilāha illā Allāh).

(4) The "trust" is the bodily organs, such as the eyes, ears, hands, legs, private parts, and tongues, which God entrusts a person with. A person must protect them and only use them in ways that are pleasing to God.

(5) The "trust" refers to the various trusts that people deposit with others, and keeping promises.

(6) The "trust" is knowledge of God and all that it entails. This is closest to the true meaning, and comes near to what we said previously.

Exegetes have also differed over what it means to offer the trust. Some of their views are:

(1) "Offering the trust" is meant literally. However, when the Qur'an speaks of "offering the trust to the heavens, earth, and mountains," it means that God offered the trust to the inhabitants of those places—for instance, the angels in the heavens. God made it clear to them that betraying the trust would be an enormous sin, so they declined it and feared to bear it. However, God offered it to the human being, and the human being did not decline it.

(2) "Offering the trust" is meant literally. When God created the heavens, earth, and mountains, He placed the capacity for understanding in them and told them, "I am setting forth an obligation. I have created Paradise for whoever obeys Me, and the Fire for whoever disobeys Me." They said, "We are compelled to do what you created us for. We cannot bear this obligation, and we seek neither reward nor punishment." However, when God created

Adam, He offered him this trust and he accepted it; he was unjust to himself and foolish about the severity of the consequences.

(3) "Offering the trust (*ʿaraḍnā*)" means "arguing or debating about it (*muʿāriḍah*)". When it says "We offered the trust," it means that God had the trust dispute against the heavens, earth, and mountains, and it won out and proved to be heavier than them.

(4) The verse is metaphorical and speaks of religious duties and the capability to fulfil them. That is, it means: "If God were to grant the heavens, the earth, and the mountains the ability to understand, and were to present them this trust, they would fear it and reject it; however, the human being would accept it."

Looking back at what we said already regarding these verses will reveal the weak points in each of these views; therefore, take heed.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfi*, in a chain of narration from Muḥammad ibn Sālim, it is related in a hadith that Imām al-Bāqir said:
God never curses a believer. God, the Mighty and Glorious, says: *Allah has cursed the deniers and prepared for them a blazing fire to abide therein forever; they shall find no protector and no helper* (33:64-65).

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related via a chain of narration from Abū Baṣīr from Imām al-Bāqir:
The Israelites used to accuse Moses of having something wrong with his male organ since, whenever Moses wished to bathe, he would go to a place where no one could see him. One day, he was bathing at the bank of a river and had placed his clothing on a rock. So God ordered the rock to slide away from him [thereby making Moses chase it] so that the Israelites would see him and know that what they had said was not true. So God revealed: *O you who believe! Do not be like those who vexed Moses. Allah absolved him of what they said, and he had a position with Allah.* (33:69)

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is related:
Exegetes disagree about how they were troubling Moses. One

view is that Moses and Aaron climbed a mountain, and Aaron died. The Israelites accused Moses of killing Aaron, so God commanded the angels to bear the dead body over the Israelites, and the angels spoke of his death so that they understood that he had died of natural causes, and God absolved him of that accusation. This is related from ʿAlī and Ibn ʿAbbas.

Another view is that Moses used to be extremely modest and discreet, and used to bathe alone. So the Israelites asked, "What is he hiding from us unless he has a skin problem, or leprosy, or a scrotal hernia?" So once when he was bathing, he put his clothes on a rock, and the rock slid away with his clothes. Moses chased after it, and the Israelites saw him naked and saw that he was handsome, well-built man. Thus, God absolved him of what they said. This is related from Abū Hurayrah without a chain of narration.

Author's comments: The first narration is also related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, also from Ibn Masʿūd. The second is also related from Anas and Ibn ʿAbbās.

(4) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh relate that Sahl ibn Saʿd al-Sāʿidī said:

The Messenger of God never sat upon a *minbar* ever without reciting this verse: *O you who believe! Mind Allah, and speak rightly.* (33:70)

Author's comments: Something similar to this has also been narrated from ʿĀʾishah, Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, and ʿUrwah.

(5) In *Nahj al-Balāghah*, it is related [that Imām ʿAlī said]:

Whoever does not honour the trust shall fail. It was placed before the mighty skies, the vast earth, and the towering mountains, but none was found to be stronger, vaster, or higher than it. If anything could be unapproachable because of its height, vastness, power, or strength, it would have been them. However, they shrunk back from the consequences and understood what a weaker person would not realize; this [weaker person] was man. *He was unjust, foolish* (33:72).

(6) In *al-Kafī*, it is related via a chain of narration from Isḥāq ibn

ᶜAmmār from a man that Imām al-Bāqir said regarding *We offered the trust…* (33:72):

It is the *wilāyah* of the Commander of the Faithful [Imām ᶜAlī].

Author's comments: What is meant by "*wilāyah* of the Commander of the Faithful" is that he was the first of the *ummah* to open the door to (the divine *wilāyah)*, although he was a human being. That is, it is making God one's guardian (*walī*) in all matters, to strive in His way with sincere worship. It does not merely mean loving ᶜAlī or just believing in his imamate. While some narrations present that view, they are examples of the application of the verse [not the sole root meaning of it].

End of Chapter 33

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Chapter 34

Sūrah Saba'

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Verses 1-9

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

This sūrah addresses three theological principles: the oneness of God, prophethood, and the resurrection. After introducing them, it ruminates over what opponents of these things claim. Then it refutes them on the grounds of divine wisdom, admonition, and polite debate. This sūrah gives most importance to the matter of the resurrection, and so it mentions the resurrection at the outset and conclusion, and returns to it throughout.

The content of the verses indicates that the sūrah was revealed in Mecca.

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Commentary

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِى لَهُ مَا فِى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِى الْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِى الْآخِرَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴿١﴾

(34:1) ***Praise be to Allah, to whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth. To Him be praise in the hereafter. He is wise, aware.***

Here, the goal is to present the resurrection and recompense in a way that none could doubt. It does so by alluding to evidence which cuts short further debate. This argument is founded on two things. First is God's comprehensive reign over all things. He can dispose of them how He wills and manages all aspects of them, from their creation to their sustenance to their death, and then bringing them back to life again for recompense. Second is His complete and perfect knowledge of things from all angles. Nothing slips his notice; therefore, He can revive whomever or whatever He wills and recompense it according to His knowledge of their acts, for

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good or for ill.

The first matter [His reign] is alluded to in this verse (34:1); the second [His knowledge] is alluded to in the second verse (34:2). Therefore, it is clear that these two verses act as an introduction to the third and fourth verses.

Praise be to Allah, to whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth: This praises God for His wide, vast kingdom encompassing all things. He may do whatever He wills with all things.

To Him be praise in the hereafter: Here, "praise" is mentioned with respect to the hereafter. Previously, "praise" was spoken of with respect to the material world since the visible order of the heavens and the earth is a worldly matter, as evinced by:

On the day when the earth will be replaced with a different earth, and the heavens. (14:48)

And He is wise, aware* (khabīr)*: The verse finishes with these two divine attributes to show that His ordering and managing the physical universe, followed by His ordering and managing the hereafter, is predicated on His wisdom and awareness. His wisdom dictates that the physical world be followed by the hereafter. Were this not the case, creation would be in vain, and the good would not be distinguished from the evil. As He says:

And We have not created the heaven and the earth and what is between them in vain… Should We make those who believe and act righteously like those who cause corruption on the earth? Or should We make those who are mindful of Allah like the depraved? (38:27-28)

Through His awareness, He will muster them, not omitting a single one. Then he shall recompense every soul for what it has earned.

Khabīr ("aware") is one of the beautiful names of God. It comes from the word *khibrah*, meaning "knowledge of the particulars of a thing"; in that regard, it is more specific than *ʿalīm* ("knowledgeable").

يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۚ وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ الْغَفُورُ ﴿٢﴾

(34:2) *He knows what goes down into* (yaliju) *the earth and what emerges* (yakhruju) *from it and what descends* (yanzilu) *from heaven and what ascends* (yaʿruju) *to it. He is merciful, forgiving.*

Yaliju ("go down into") and *yakhruju* ("emerge from") are opposites, as

are *yanzilu* ("descend") and *yaʿruju* ("ascend"). Describing God's knowledge with these four opposing verbs is a figure of speech expressing that He knows every single movement and act of every single motile being. The verse concludes with *He is merciful, forgiving*; this indicates that His mercy is firmly fixed,[1] and His forgiveness stretches towards a people on account of their faith.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ ۖ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ ۖ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣﴾

(34:3) ***Those who disbelieve say, The Hour shall not come to us. Say, By my Lord, the knower of the unseen! It shall come to you. Not an atom's weight evades Him in the heavens or on earth, nor smaller than that, nor larger—but that it is in a clear book.***

They are denying the coming of the Final Hour (*al-sāʿah*)—that is, the resurrection. They are denying it, even though God's all-encompassing reign and all-encompassing knowledge are clear, so they have no grounds to doubt the coming of the Hour. Therefore, the Prophet is commanded to reply to their claims by saying: *Say, By my Lord… it shall come to you*—"it" meaning "the Hour".

Their main problem with the resurrection is the way that matter gets mixed up. For instance, after bodies decompose, they become into new bodies, and the same matter takes on a new form. Furthermore, they had never seen such a thing happen. For that reason, they deem it impossible that all the bits and pieces of bodies could be picked apart and reassembled. A refutation to this is alluded to in *Knower of the unseen! It shall come to you. Not an atom's weight evades Him in the heavens or on earth* (34:3).

Nor smaller than that, nor larger—but that it is in a clear book: His knowledge extends to all things. Therefore, all existents are inexorably inscribed in a clear, unchanging, undying book, even if their forms are

1 ʿAllāmah seems to be using the expression "firmly fixed" (*thābitah*, also meaning "stable" or "established", in *lahu raḥmatun thabitah*) as an antonym to "movement" and "motile" (*bi-ḥarakat kulli mutaḥarrik*) to contrast the perpetuity and immutability of God's mercy with the motile and transient nature of existent, created beings. (Trans.)

erased from the pages of the material universe. This was discussed previously with respect to the phrase "clear" book in the exegesis of Sūrat al-Anʿam [6:59] and elsewhere.

لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

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(34:4) *That He may reward* (li-yajzī) *those who believe and do good. They are those who shall have forgiveness and a gracious sustenance.*

Li- in *li-yajzī* denotes that *yajzī* expresses causality. It is linked to *la-taʾtiyannakum* ("it shall come to you", 34:3). [Meaning, "it shall come to you in order that He may reward", not just "it shall come to you and He will reward."]

They are those who shall have forgiveness and a gracious sustenance is parallel to *He is merciful, forgiving* (34:2).

This verse explains one of the two reasons for the resurrection. That is, the Hour will come so that God may recompense those who believe and act righteously with forgiveness and a generous sustenance—namely, Paradise and all that is in it. The other reason is alluded to in the next verse.

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وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِنْ رِجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾

(34:5) *Those who strove* (saʿaw) *to thwart Our signs* (muʿājizīn) *shall endure a revulsive* (rijz), *tortuous punishment.*

Saʿaw (from *saʿī*) means "to walk strenuously". *Muʿājizīn* is an exaggerated form of *iʿjāz* ("to render weak or incapable"); some also say it means "competing" or "racing". The verse is metaphorical. It is as if the signs of God are goal-posts which they are rushing towards to try to disable God and outstrip Him. *Rijz* means *rijs* ("filth"). Possibly, it refers to wicked acts. Therefore, it would imply that this revulsive punishment is in exchange for their wicked acts, or because of their wicked acts. Some say that *rijz* means "a terrible punishment".

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The verse is an insinuation towards the deniers (*kuffār*) who insist on denying the resurrection.

وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقَّ وَيَهْدِي

إِلَىٰ صِرَاطِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٦﴾

(34:6) ***Those who have been given knowledge see that what has been revealed to you from your Lord is the truth and guides to the path of the Mighty, the Praised.***

The first pronoun *who* [*alladhīna*, in *those who have been given knowledge*] is the subject of the verb *see*. The second pronoun *what* [*alladhī*, in *that what has been revealed to you*] is the first object of the verb, and *the truth* (al-ḥaqq) is the second object of the verb.

Those who have been given knowledge (alladhīna ūtū al-ʿilm) are those with knowledge of God and His signs.

That which has been revealed to you is the Qur'an, revealed from God to the Prophet.

There are two possible ways to see this sentence grammatically. It may be a new sentence, contrasting the previous sentence [*those who have been given knowledge* versus *those who disbelieve*]. Or, it may be an adverbial clause (*ḥāl*) describing *those who disbelieve*, thereby rendering the meaning: "They say, 'The Hour will not come to us'—denying it out of ignorance—whereas those with knowledge of God and His signs see that this Qur'an was revealed to you informing them that the Hour is coming, and it is the truth.'"

And guides to the path of the Mighty, the Praised: This is grammatically linked to *the truth* via "and", meaning, "They see that the Qur'an guides to the path of the One who is Mighty and Praised. He is Mighty (ʿ*azīz*) because He is never-vanquished, and His will always predominates. He is Praised (*ḥamīd*) for all of His acts, for despite His mightiness, His acts are always good and beautiful. And He is God, exalted be He!"

Describing God as *Mighty* and *Praised* acts as a contrast to how some people attempted [in vain] to weaken God or thwart His signs (34:5).[1]

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ إِذَا مُزِّقْتُمْ كُلَّ
مُمَزَّقٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿٧﴾

1 This and the previous paragraph have been moved up from the exegesis on 34:7 (which is where ʿAllāmah situated them) since they relate to this verse. (Trans.)

(34:7) ***And those who disbelieve say, Shall we point you to a man who will tell you that when you have been scattered about*** **(muzziqtum)**, ***you shall become a new creation?***

By saying "a man" (*Shall we point you to a man*), they are mocking the Prophet. They all know that the Prophet is the one who is going around telling people about the resurrection.

The verb *muzziqtum* (scattered about) means "to tear apart" or "to rupture". [Here, it is translated as *scattered*.] By *new creation* (khalqin jadīd), they mean that they will take on a new, stable, enduring form. That is, it is as if, after being annihilated at death, they will be revived and created anew, thereby being a *new creation*.

The clause *when you have been scattered about* is an adverbial clause describing, *you shall become a new creation*.

It means: In order to make fun of the Prophet for warning them about the resurrection and recompense, some of the disbelievers are telling others, "Should we point you to a man"—and by this, they mean the Prophet—"who is telling you that you shall be recreated and revived, brought back into being, after your bodies have turned to dust and been scattered about, such your remains cannot be distinguished from anything else?"

أَفْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ ۗ بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ ﴿٨﴾

(34:8) ***Has he forged a lie against Allah, or is he insane? Nay, those who do not believe in the hereafter are in punishment and great error.***

Through this question, they express their amazement. Surely, a sane and rational person would never claim that decomposed dead bodies would be put back together again! He must be somehow lying to the people and trying to misguide them for his own agenda. Either it is a blatant lie, or he is stark raving mad.

It means: "Is he of sound mind, and just fibbing, claiming that God will resurrect us? Or has he just lost it, babbling any thought that comes to mind, without thinking straight?"

Nay, those who do not believe in the hereafter are in punishment and great error: This refutes them and kills their argument that there are only two options: that he must be either lying or mad. It presents a third option:

he is neither lying nor mad; rather, those disbelievers will be the ones who will be abiding in the punishment that will become clear to them. This has kept them from the truth. They were so deeply misguided that their intellects could not grasp and acquiesce to the truth.

Nay, those who do not believe in the hereafter: This indicates that the reason that they fell into divine punishment and misguidance is because they lacked faith in the hereafter.

أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنْ نَشَأْ نَخْسِفْ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطْ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسَفًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُنِيبٍ ﴿٩﴾

(34:9) ***Do they not look at what is before them and behind them in the sky and the earth? If We willed, we could swallow them up in the land or cause fragments of the sky to fall upon them. This is a sign for every servant who turns [towards Allah].***

This warns them of the magnitude of what they are doing when they accuse the Prophet of lying about the signs of God and mock him. *What is before them and what is behind them* expresses how the sky and earth engulf them. Wherever they look, the sky shades them from above, and the earth bears them; there is no escape.

If We willed, we could swallow them up in the land or cause fragments of the sky to fall upon them: Since the earth and sky surround them, and the earth and sky obey the divine command, if He willed, God could easily swallow them up in the earth or cast part of the heavens down upon them, and wipe them out. So why don't they cease and desist from saying these things?

This is a sign for every servant who turns [towards Allah]: Meaning, the fact that God could obliterate them by swallowing them up in the earth or casting the heavens down upon them is a sign for every servant [of God] who obediently turns to his Lord. No one mocks these things or accuses the Prophet of lying about divine signs—no one except the arrogant, who are too puffed up about themselves to turn to their Lord or return to Him obediently.

Verses 10-21

The verses tell a fragment of the stories of David and Solomon, both of whom God blessed. God made the mountains and birds act in unison with David, and softened iron for him. God gave Solomon control over winds making month-long journeys, and put the jinn under his employ to hew prayer-niches, statues, and other things, however he liked. God commands both of them to express gratitude through acting righteously; and both of them were grateful servants of God.

Then it turns to the story of Saba'. God blessed Saba' with two gardens, one on the right and one on the left, so that they could subsist comfortably on them. However, they denied God's blessings and became ungrateful, so God set upon them a violent flood, shattering their dam and besetting their gardens, which never grew back the same. They had developed their land but denied God's blessings. Therefore, God reduced them to mere legends and scattered them about, for they had denied the blessings of God and snubbed thankfulness. Thus, they were only paid back for their denial and ingratitude.

These two stories link with the previous content through mention of the resurrection. God looks after the affairs of His servants. They are swimming in an ocean of blessings, one after another. The blessed had ought to be thankful for their blessings. Furthermore, it is upon God to distinguish the grateful from the ungrateful. If these two groups are not distinguished in this world, there is another realm where they may be distinguished; and none can flee the resurrection.

Commentary

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا ۖ يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ ۖ وَأَلَنَّا لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ ﴿١٠﴾

(34:10) ***And We gave David bounty*** **(faḍlan)** ***from us. O mountains! Echo*** **(awwibī)** ***Allah's praises with him. And O birds! [Do the same!] And We softened iron for him.***

Faḍl means "a gift". The verb *awwibī* comes from the root *a-w-b* which means "to return"; here, it means that their voices echo back with the glorification of God. This can be deduced from:

We made the mountains sing the glory [of Allah] with him at eventide and morn. And the birds flocked together—all turning to Him. (38:18–19)

Birds and *mountains* are linked together with the conjunction "and".[1] This refutes the exegetical view that *awwibī* means "travel" and that the mountains used to physically follow David wherever he walked.

O mountains! Echo Allah's praises with him. And O birds! [Do the same!]: This indirectly explains what was gifted to David. Instead of telling David, "We gave you control over the mountains and birds," it tells the mountains and birds to emulate David. Stylistically, the cause is mentioned in place of the effect. It means: We gave him control over the mountains and birds so that they would emulate him. This is the main point behind giving him control over the mountains and birds, as is also indicated in:

We made the mountains sing the glory [of Allah] with him at eventide and morn. And the birds flocked together—all turning to Him. (38:18–19)

And We softened iron for him: Meaning that We made it pliant for him despite its inherent stiffness.

أَنِ اعْمَلْ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ ۖ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا ۖ إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

(34:11) *Fashion coats of mail* (sābighāt), *balancing the chain-links* (sard), *and work righteousness; I see what you do.*

Sābighāt is the plural of *sābighah*, meaning "armor". *Sard* are the chain-links in mail. *Balancing the chain-links* means to be measured in how he is shaping the links of the armor; that is, he should make a large coat of mail with appropriately-sized links. *Work righteousness* explains why iron was made to yield to him.

And work righteousness; I see what you do: In and of itself, the meaning of the sentence is apparent. In the context of these verses, this sentence explains why they were gifted these things. Recounting what they had been

1 Meaning that the birds and mountains were commanded to do the same thing together, even though there are intervening words between "mountains" and "birds". (Trans.)

blessed with serves as a means of commanding them to be thankful. It is as if it is saying: "Be thankful for the blessings We have granted you and your people, and express this gratitude through working righteous deeds."

وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ غُدُوُّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَاحُهَا شَهْرٌ ۖ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقِطْرِ ۖ
وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ مَنْ يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ ۖ وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا
نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿١٢﴾

(34:12) ***And We (gave) Solomon the wind, whose morning course was a month and whose evening course was a month. And We made a fountain of molten copper flow for him. And some of the jinn worked before him, by the permission of his Lord. And those that deviated from Our command—We made them taste punishment of fire.***

Meaning, We subjected the wind to Solomon; in the span of a morning—that is, from daybreak until noon—it used to travel a month's distance; and then, in the span of an evening—that is, from noon until eventide—it would travel another month's distance, thereby completing two month's distance in the span of a day.

And We made a fountain of molten copper* (qiṭr) *flow* (asalnā) *for him: The verb *asalnā* is from the root *s-a-l*, meaning "to flow". *Qiṭr* means "copper". All in all, it means, "We melted copper for him, and it streamed like a flowing fountain."

And some of the jinn* (min al-jinn) *worked before him* (yaʿmal bayna yadayhi), *by the permission of his Lord: *Min al-jinn* means "some of the jinn" or "a group of jinn"; this understanding of the meaning of *min al-jinn* is evident from *They were making for him…* (34:13).[1]

They *worked before him* [*bayna yadayhi*, lit. "between his hands"] by the permission of his Lord because they had been put under his control.

***And those that deviated* (man yazigh minhum):** Meaning, "those that deviated" or "those that were diverted".

From Our [Allah's] command: Meaning, they did not obey Solomon.

We made them taste punishment of fire: The context indicates that

1 ʿAllāmah clarifies this because the pronoun "*min*" in Arabic can be understood multiple ways. (Trans.)

this fire was worldly, not otherworldly. The wording of the verse (*min al-jinn*) also suggests that only some of the jinn were subjected to Solomon, not all of them.

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِيبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ
رَاسِيَاتٍ ۚ اعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُودَ شُكْرًا ۚ وَقَلِيلٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ ﴿١٣﴾

(34:13) ***They were making for him whatever he willed: places of worship*** **(maḥārīb)**, ***images*** **(tamāthīl)**, ***basins like reservoirs*** **(jifānin kal-jawāb)**, ***and cauldrons firmly anchored*** **(qudūrin rāsiyāt)**. ***Give thanks, O family of David! Although few of My servants are thankful.***

Maḥārīb is the plural of *miḥrāb* ("prayer-niche"), which is a place that a person stands to worship in. *Tamāthīl* is the plural of *timthāl* ("statue"). *Jifān* is the plural of *jafnah*, which is a gargantuan serving-bowl. *Jawāb* is the plural of *jābiyah*, which is a pool or basin which water is kept in. *Qudūr* is the plural of *qidr* ("cooking-pot", "kettle"). *Rāsiyāt* means "fixed"; that is, they were so big that they were fixed in their places and could not be moved.

Give thanks, O family of David!: This is addressed to Solomon and the other kin of David who were with him. It tells them to work and worship God out of gratitude towards Him.

Although few of My servants are thankful: Meaning, thankful to God, thanking Him again and again. This sentence either (a) exalts the status of those who are grateful by declaring them rare and unique, or (b) provides further explanation, as if it is saying, "The grateful are few, so increase their number!"

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ
مِنسَأَتَهُ ۖ فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنُّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي
الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ ﴿١٤﴾

(34:14) ***When We decreed death for him, naught showed them his death but an earth-creature*** **(dābbat al-arḍ)** ***nibbling on his staff*** **(minsaʾatahu)**. ***When he fell, the jinn saw clearly [that he had died]. Had they known the unseen, they would not have tarried***

in humiliating punishment.

According to narrations, *dābbat al-arḍ* here means "termite (*arḍah*)". *Minsaʾah* means "staff".

***When he fell* (kharra):** *Kharra* means "to fall to the ground".

From the verses, it can be understood that when Solomon died, he had been leaning on his staff. He remained in that position, upright and leaning on his staff, for some time, and so no one—neither man nor jinn—realized that he had died. Then, God, the Mighty and Glorious, sent a termite to munch away at his staff. After it had eaten, the staff broke, and Solomon fell. Then, they knew that he had died, and it became clear that if the jinn had known the unseen, they would have known that Solomon had died and they would not have continued working for him, from the time he died until the time he fell over; they would have not remained in such tortuous, humiliating drudgery. However, his death was veiled from them.

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكَنِهِمْ آيَةٌ ۖ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ ۖ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ ۚ بَلْدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾

(34:15) ***There was a sign for Sabaʾ in their abode: two gardens to the right and left. Eat of the sustenance of your Lord and thank Him—a fair land and a forgiving Lord.***

The Sabaʾ were pure-blooded Arabs (*al-ʿarab al-ʿāribah*)[1] from Yemen. They are said to have been named Sabaʾ after their progenitor Sabaʾ ibn Yashjub ibn Yaʿrub ibn Qaḥṭān.

To the right and left means to the right and left of their dwellings.

Eat of the sustenance of your Lord: This instructs them to eat from the two gardens; this is a figure of speech for living off the gardens. Then it instructs them to thank God for His blessings and sustenance.

A fair land and a forgiving Lord: Meaning, a suitable, wholesome place to live and a Lord who is oft-forgiving, and does not take them to account for their shortcomings.

1 In classical Islamic literature, the Arabs are divided into two groups: the "pure" Arabs (*ʿarab al-ʿāribah*, who were considered to be descendants of Qaḥṭān), and the "Arabicized" Arabs (who were considered to be descendants of ʿAdnān). The Arabs of Yemen were considered descendants of Qaḥṭān. (Trans.)

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتَيْ أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثْلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٦﴾

(34:16) ***But they turned aside, so We sent upon them a dam-breaking flood*** **(sayl al-ʿarim),** ***and replaced their gardens with gardens yielding bitter fruit, tamarisk, and a smattering of lote-trees*** **(ukulin khamṭin wa athalin wa shayʾin min sidrin qalīl).**

ʿArim means "dam". Some say that it means "torrential rain".[1] There are other views.

Ukul refers to any fruit which is eaten. It is said that *khamṭ* refers to any edible, bitter herb or vegetable. *Athal* is tamarisk; some say that it refers to a tree that looks similar to tamarisk but which is larger and does not bear fruit. *Sidr* has its conventional meaning [of lote-tree]. *Athal* and *shayʾ* are appended to *ukul* not *khamṭ*.

It means: The people of Sabaʾ ceased to be grateful, even though they had been commanded to do so. Therefore, God flooded their lands. Their gardens perished, and God replaced them with plantations yielding bitter fruit and tamarisk and a handful of lote-trees.

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا ۖ وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَفُورَ ﴿١٧﴾

(34:17) ***We requited them*** **(jazaynāhum)** ***with this*** **(dhālik)** ***because they disbelieved, and We only punish the ungrateful.***

The pronoun *this* refers to what was said about sending the flood and replacing the gardens. It is in the accusative and acts as a second object to *We requited*. According to exegetes, the difference between *jazāʾ* ("requital", "repayment") and *al-mujāzāh* ("requital, "punishment") [both from the root *j-z-*y] is that *mujāzah* is only used for negative consequences, whereas *jazāʾ* can be used more broadly.

It means: (a) We requited Sabaʾ thusly because they were ungrateful and turned away from being thankful, or (b) We never requite anyone with evil unless they have been extremely ungrateful for God's blessings.

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرًى ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَّرْنَا فِيهَا

1 In English, it is often just referred to as the "flood of ʿArim". (Trans.)

السَّيْرَ ۖ سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِيَ وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

(34:18) ***And We set between them*** **(baynahum)** ***and the towns We had blessed [other] towns easily seen, and We apportioned the journey therein. Travel through them for nights and days, secure.***

Them in [the clause] *between them* refers to Saba'. This is said in the context of elaborating upon the conclusion of their story and links back to *There was a sign for Saba' in their abode* (34:15). *The towns We had blessed* refers to the towns of Syria. *Easily seen* (ẓāhirah) means that they were close enough to each other that one could be seen from the other.

And We apportioned the journey therein: Meaning, We spaced them out equally at a distance suitable to travel between.

Travel through them for nights and days, secure: It is implied that God is telling them this. That is, it is as if God is telling them, "Travel through these towns by day, if you wish, and by night, if you wish." It means that God made them safe enough to travel through whenever they wanted without any fear or apprehension.

فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَّقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَّقٍ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿١٩﴾

(34:19) ***And they said, O Lord! Increase the distance of our journeys. They wronged themselves, so We made them into but tales, and We scattered them completely. In that, there is a sign for everyone who is patient and grateful.***

Meaning, We blessed them with abundant fruits and nearby waystations and safe roads and ease of travel and an affluent living, but they grew bored of that and said, *O Lord! Increase the distance of our journeys*—meaning, "make our journeys longer so that we can cut across the deserts and wilds on our animals." This was wrong of them and was ungrateful, just like how the Israelites asked for garlic and onions instead of manna and quail.

In short, God completed His blessings upon them by making their waystations close and secure. He showered His blessings upon them when they were on the road, just as He had in their settlements. He wanted them to be thankful for that. However, they refused to acknowledge how God

had blessed them on their journeys, just as they refused to acknowledge how that God had blessed them in their settlements. So God hastened to give them what they wanted: He destroyed their lands and scattered their population.

And they said, O Lord! Increase the distance of our journeys: Implicitly, they were asking for their cities to be destroyed.[1]

They wronged themselves: Meaning, through sins.

So We made them into but tales, and We scattered them completely: God made them and their ruins vanish. Only their names remained. Nothing survived of them except legends in people's imaginations. God scattered them so wholly that no trace of them remained. They disappeared despite the strength and glory they had built in their society such that they became proverbial: "To be separated like the people of Saba'," meaning, to split apart with no hope of return.

In that, there is a sign for everyone who is patient and grateful: Meaning, in the part of their story that was mentioned, there are signs for all who are abundantly patient in the way of God and abundantly thankful for His countless blessings. From the verses, it can be understood that it is the duty of the human being to worship His Lord out of gratitude for His blessings, and that before the human being lies a day on which he will be resurrected and recompensed for his deeds.

وَلَقَدْ صَدَّقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(34:20) *And Iblīs proved his opinion of them to be true, so they followed him, apart from a group of the believers.*

This refers to when Iblīs said: *I shall deceive them and misguide them*; *You shall not find most of them to be grateful* (15:39; 7:17). It means that either Iblīs was able to deceive and misguide them, or else that he discovered that his words held true for them.

So they followed him, apart from a group of the believers: This clarifies what it meant for his opinion to be found true.

From this, it is clear that the pronoun *them* here and in the next verse refers to people in general, not just the people of Saba', although the verse

1 Because, after they were scattered abroad, they had vast distances between each other. [Trans.]

applies to them.

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ ۗ وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ ﴿٢١﴾

(34:21) ***And he had no authority over them, save that We might distinguish the one who believes in the hereafter from the one who is in doubt. And your Lord preserves all things.***

Since Iblīs was unable to force them to follow him, they chose to follow him out of their own free will. Therefore, they have no excuse. They cannot say they were compelled, for they were the ones who made the bad decision to give him power over themselves. He could not have done that on his own. God told Iblīs: "*You shall have no control over My servants except for the misguided who follow you* (15:42). And Iblīs will tell them on the day of resurrection: "*I had no power over you all except that I called to you and you responded to me. So do not blame me; rather, blame yourselves*" (14:22).

Ultimately, they followed him because they doubted the hereafter. This doubt was rooted in their hearts, and one of the ways that it manifested was through following Iblīs. God allowed Iblīs to control them to the degree that they ceded control to him, so that those who doubt the hereafter would be distinguished from those with faith in it. This does not in any way lift the responsibility from them for their choice to follow him, for it was a choice.

And he had no authority over them: He had no control over them at all.

Save that We might distinguish* (li-naʿlama)*: Meaning, to distinguish one group from the other [not literally to "know", which is the conventional meaning of *naʿlama*].

The one who believes in the hereafter from the one who is in doubt: This is an exception to the statement that he had no authority over them. It means that he had no authority over them unless they gave him authority over them through their own free will. In this expression, the ultimate goal of "We might distinguish" is used in place of "he had authority." [That is, conventionally, the expression might read, "He had no power over any of them except those who let him control them"; but, instead, it is phrased as, "He had no power over them, except that We willed to distinguish one group from another."]

Faith and doubt in the hereafter, as opposed to faith and doubt in God Himself, are specified here since faith in the hereafter alone bars a person from sinning and pushes them to obey God. Faith in God and His Messenger alone would not do that, were there no hereafter. God says:

Those who stray from the path of Allah shall have a severe torment, for they forgot the Day of Accounting. (38:26)

And your Lord preserves all things: Meaning, He is the Knower whose knowledge escapes him not—neither through forgetting nor absentmindedness nor some other way. This phrase implicitly warns against ingratitude and evildoing, and implicitly warns those who do such things.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Kamāl al-Dīn*, with a chain of narration from Hishām ibn Sālim from Imām al-Ṣādiq, in a narration about the story of David, Imām al-Ṣādiq says:
He would go outside reciting the Psalms, and whenever he recited the Psalms, all of the mountains, rocks, and birds would reply.

(2) Regarding*Fashion coats of mail (*sābighāt*), balancing the chain-links (*sard*), and work righteousness; I see what you do* (34:11), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* relates:
Fashion coats of mail (sābighāt, 34:11): *Sābighāt* means "armor".
Balancing the chain-links (wa qaddir fī al-sard, 34:11) speaks of pinning the mail-links together.
And We [gave] Solomon the wind, whose morning course was a month and whose evening course was a month (34:12): The wind used to carry the throne of Solomon, and so, in one morning, he would travel a month's distance, and then, in the evening, another month's distance.

(3) In *al-Kafī*, via a chain of narration from Dāwūd ibn al-Ḥāṣīn and Abān ibn ʿUthman, it is related that al-Faḍl Abū al-ʿAbbās said:
I asked Imām al-Bāqir about *They were making for him whatever he willed: places of worship, images, basins like reservoirs…* (34:13).[1]
He replied, "These were not statues of men and women; rather,

1 He is asking this because statue-making is forbidden in Islamic law, so the implied question is "why was he building statues?" or "what were these statues of?" (Trans.)

they were statues of trees and similar things."

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related from some of the author's companions in a *marfūʿ* manner[1] from Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam:
Imām al-Kāẓim said, "O Hishām! God has praised the minority." Then he recited, "*Few of My servants are thankful* (34:13)."

Author's comments: This meaning recurs in some other narrations and relates one of the two possible meanings mentioned for the end of verse 34:13.

(5) In *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿiʾ*, it is related via a chain of narration that Imām al-Bāqir said:
Solomon, the son of David, commanded the jinn to build him a domed alcove out of glass. One day, he was leaning on his staff under this dome and keeping an eye on the jinn to see how they were regarding him, when something startled him: a man was in the dome. Solomon asked him, "Who are you?"
The man said, "I am the one who takes no bribe and fears no king. I am the Angel of Death."
Then the Angel of Death took his soul while he was leaning on his staff in the dome and the jinn were watching him.
For a year, the jinn kept working for him, until God—the Mighty and Glorious—sent a termite to eat his staff (*mansaʾah*)—and *mansaʾah* means "staff". When he fell, it became clear that if the jinn had known the unseen, they would not have remained in that humiliating drudgery.

Author's comments: A number of Sunni and Shiʿi narrations say that he remained standing upright, leaning on his staff, for a year.

(6) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, a narration from Farwah ibn Masīk says:
I asked the Messenger of God about Sabaʾ—is it the name of a man of a woman?
He [the Prophet] said, "He was an Arab who sired ten sons. Six of them settled in Yemen (*tayāmin*), and four of them settled in Syria (*tashāʾam*). The *tayāmin* were [the forebears of the tribes of] al-Azd, Kindah, Madhḥaj, al-Ashʿarūn, Anmār, and Ḥumayr.
A man asked, "Who were the Anmār?"
He [the Prophet] said, "The ones who the [tribes of the] Khathʿam

1 That is, without an intervening chain of narration. (Trans.)

and the Bajīlah come from. The *tashāʾam* were the [forebears of the tribes of the] ʿĀmilah, the Judhām, the Lakhm, and the Ghassān."

Author's comments: This is also related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from some authors of *jāmiʿ* and *sunan* collections of narrations. *Tayāman* and *tashāʾam* mean that they lived in Yemen or Syria (Shām), respectively.[1]

(7) In *al-Kāfī*, via a chain of narration from Sudayr, it is related that Sudayr said:

A man asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about *And they said, O Lord! Increase the distance of our journeys. They wronged themselves…* (34:19). He said, "These were a people who had towns connected with one another, such that you could look from one to the other; flowing rivers; and obvious wealth. However, they became ungrateful for the blessings of God—the Mighty and Glorious—and cast off the well-being and security that God had granted them. So God inverted these blessings. *And Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is inside themselves* (13:11). God flooded their lands, scattered their towns, ruined their homes, destroyed their wealth, and replaced their gardens with gardens yielding bitter fruit, tamarisk, and a smattering of lote-trees." Then he recited, "*We requited them with this because they disbelieved, and We only punish the ungrateful* (34:17)."

Author's comments: Some narrations say that "the towns which God had blessed" are the family (*ahl al-bayt*) of the Prophet, and the "towns easily seen" are the intermediaries between them and the people, such as those who relate their narrations, or others. This is one of the deeper meanings of the Qur'an and is not an actual exegesis in any way.

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1 Some people take *tayāman* to mean "auspicious" or "fortunate" and *tashāʾam* to mean "inauspicious" or "unfortunate", although ʿAllāmah does not present this meaning. (Trans.)

Verses 22-30

These verses discuss *tawḥīd* (Oneness of God) and proofs of it.

Commentary

قُلِ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۖ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكٍ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ ظَهِيرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(34:22) ***Say: Call upon those whom you swear by, other than Allah; they do not control an atom's-weight in the heavens or on the earth, and they have no share in either. And none of them is a helper to Him.***

This verse commands the Prophet to argue that their demigods are false, for they are powerless to respond to their prayers. *Call upon those whom you swear by, other than Allah* means "call upon those whom you have sworn are gods other than God." The two objects of *swear* are left unmentioned but are understood from the context. "Call upon them" means "ask them for something you need."

They do not control an atom's-weight in the heavens or on the earth: This is framed as a response, as if this is the implied dialogue: "So what will happen if they call on them?" "They shall not respond to them in any way, for *they do not control an atom's-weight in the heavens or on the earth*." If they did have control, they would have responded. And, a demiurge can only be said to enjoy lordship or divinity if it controls a thing that people require and which it can bless people with. If it can do that, then it deserves to be worshipped and thanked. However, if it controls nothing, then it is neither a god nor a lord.

And they have no share in either: That they have no control was asserted in *they do not control* (la yamlikūna). "Control" [*mulk*, which can also mean "rule over" or "own"] is meant in an absolute sense for all existence. Here, in this sentence, what is being negated is any control over

any part of existence, divided or undivided. The idolaters (*mushrikīn*) used to claim that rulership was shared between their demigods and God. They held that each of their demigods controlled a part of creation, whereas God was the Lord of Lords and God of Gods.

Therefore, their demigods must reply when they are called, at least with respect to matters under their scope. Their lack of response makes it clear that they have no form of divinity or lordship.

And none of them is a helper to Him: Meaning, none of them wholly or partially aids God, since there is no reason that God is unable to uphold and manage the universe on His own. If He had a helper to assist him in managing the universe, it would be a ruler in its own right and would respond when called upon for assistance in matters in its office. Since this does not happen, this is not the case.

From what has been previously, it is clear that three facets run through this argument that the absence of response from their demigods equals the absence of their demigod. These facets are: (a) whether or not their demigods have absolute control over the heavens and earth, (b) whether or not their demigods are partners with God, or (c) whether or not their demigods help or support God.

وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ ۚ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِّعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ
قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا الْحَقَّ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٢٣﴾

(34:23) ***And intercession shall be of no avail before Him, except for whom He allows. Until [the time] when fear is removed from their hearts, they will ask, What did your Lord say? They will say, the truth, and He is the High, the Great.***

The idolaters used to claim that their demigods would intercede for them, as God says: *They say, These are our intercessors before Allah* (10:18). Here, "intercession" does not mean intercession in the hereafter, which is something the Qur'an establishes, for they did not believe in the hereafter. Rather, it is referring to intercession in worldly affairs: they would worship their demigods, and their demigods, in turn, would plead to God on their behalf to take care of their needs or fix their problems.

The argument here is as follows: If their demigods were creations of God and under His control in every way, there is no way that they could intercede independently—unless God granted them that capacity.

Therefore, the root of the matter is whether or not God has granted them permission to intercede.

Except for whom* (li-man) *He allows: There are two possibilities for the interpretation of *li-* in *li-man*:

First, it could denote ownership (*lām al-mulk*); hence *for whom* (li-man) would refer to the angels. In this case, it would mean, "Intercession shall be of no avail, except for those who seek intercession from those whom God has allowed intercede."

Second, it could denote causality (*taʿlīl*), in which case, it would mean "those whom God allows to receive intercession." That is, it would mean: "Intercession shall be of no avail, except for those whom God has permitted to receive intercession."

Tafsīr al-Kashshāf says that the second interpretation "is a subtle interpretation and is the correct one."

This is the correct view, for, elsewhere, God speaks of the angels as intermediaries carrying out the divine command:

They do not precede Him in speech, and do as they are told (21:27).

All praise be to Allah, originator of the heavens and the earth, maker of the angels as messengers with wings two, three, and four. He adds to creation as He wills. Allah has power over all things. (35:1)

The form of being an intermediary mentioned here is that of being an intercessor; this was discussed more in the first [Arabic] volume in the discourse on intercession.[1]

All of the angels are intercessors, but not for everything or everyone. Rather, they can intercede in the matters which God permits them to intercede in, and for the people whom God permits them to intercede for. Their ability to intercede is contingent on their receiving divine permission to intercede for specific people; it is not a question of whether or not they can inherently intercede. Therefore, this verse is in the meaning of *they only intercede for whom Allah wills* (21:28), not in the meaning of *none can intercede, except by His will* (10:3).

Until [the time] when fear is removed* (fuzziʿa) *from their hearts, they will ask, What did your Lord say? They will say, The truth, and He is the High, the Great: *Fuzziʿa* means "removing fear (*fazaʿ*)". According to the context, the plural pronoun *they* refers to the intercessors; that is,

1 See the discussion appended to the exegesis of Qur'an 2:47-48 (volume 1 of the English translation). (Trans.)

the angels.

Until [the time] when fear is removed from their hearts: This denotes an end-point [such as a boundary in time]. That is, something must occur to make them frightened; and then, something will remove that fear. What has happened is that they are awaiting the divine command; upon receiving that, the fear is lifted. The verse is in the same vein as:

And whatever creature that is in the heavens and that is on the earth makes obeisance to Allah, and the angels, and they do not show pride. They fear their Lord above them and do what they are commanded. (16:49-50)

Fazaʿ is a sense of terror and constriction; their obeisance (*sajdah*) here expresses their humility out of fear of their Lord above them.

From this, it is clear that what is meant by "fear" here is the humility in their hearts that overwhelms them, for they are the means – the "intercessors" – through which the divine command is enacted. This fear continues to ensure that they have enacted the commands as per what God has ordered. It eases when the divine command reaches them and they busy themselves in carrying it out. It is as if they exist for nothing apart from enacting and obeying the divine command; it is as if nothing stands between God and the enactment of the divine decree, apart from His command. Understand that.

They are described as experiencing *fazaʿ* and *tafzīʿ* in their hearts in order to show that they are heedless of their own selves, and of everything except their Lord. They sense nothing else, until the fear is lifted from their hearts upon the issuing of the divine command. Then, with no delay, they carry it out; they do not procrastinate. God says:

Whenever He wills something, he says to it Be! and it is. (36:82)

Therefore, with this in mind, it can be deduced from this verse that they remain in this state of fear until the fear is lifted from their hearts by receiving the divine command.

They will ask, What did your Lord say? They will say, the truth, and He is the High, the Great: This indicates that the angels consist of many different groups; they ask each other about the divine command after it has been issued and the fear has been lifted from their hearts. From this, it can be deduced that the divine command reaches some of them quicker than others; otherwise, they would not be asking each other about it.

Therefore, they have varying levels and degrees; some are above others. The lower ones receive the divine command from the higher ones

without any delay. That is, the lower ones obey the higher ones. This can also be deduced from the verse *There is no one who lacks an assigned place* (37:164), after some contemplation on it. It can also be deduced from the verse on the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*): *Possessed of power before a mighty throne—obeyed, trustworthy* (81:20-21).

Although they are both obedient and obeyed, they are all only really obeying God, for He is the true one whom they obey. The superior angels' only concern is to deliver the divine command to their subordinates. From the expression *They will ask, What did your Lord say? They will say, The truth, and He is the High, the Great*—in particular, describing God's word as *truth* (*ḥaqq*)—it can be understood that this decree is fixed and cannot be negated or tinkered with.

How subtle is the end of the verse! It wraps up with *He is the High, the Great*—meaning that He is the High, above all things, and the Great, whom all other things shrink before. The honoured angels can do naught except receive His word of truth, carry it out, and obey, as He wills.

Therefore, this verse indicates that, inside themselves, are fearful and humble, heedless of all but their Lord, gazing towards the divine courtyard and magnificence, awaiting the command, at which time the fear is lifted from their hearts. There are varying groups of angels, at different levels, high and low; the higher ones deliver the divine command to the lower ones as it descends.

Although they are intermediaries and intercessors, they do not interfere in the workings of the universe unless their Lord has specially permitted them to do so. They enact the divine command in creation as it is sent and do not act independently or according to their own opinion, for beings such as this see and hear nothing except obeying their Lord in what He commands. With this in mind, how could they be independent overlords with their own ideas about what to give or withhold?

Exegetes have also put forward other interpretations of this verse:

(1) The pronoun *their* and the second *they* (in *they will ask*) refer to the idolaters, and the first *they* (in *they will say*) refers to the angels, meaning that the idolaters will be frozen in fear [on the Day of Judgment]. Then, when the fear is lifted from their hearts, the angels will ask them, "What did your Lord say?" The idolaters will reply, "The truth." Thus, they will confess what they denied in this world.

(2) The pronoun *their* in *their hearts* refers to the angels, and it means that when the angels who have been entrusted with recording people's deeds ascend to the heavens, the other angels will be stricken with terror. This is because the recording angels have ponderous, petrifying voices, and so the other angels will fear that the final Hour has come. Therefore, they will fall in obeisance to God until the fear is lifted from their hearts and they realize that the divine command is about something other than the Hour. They will ask each other, "What did your Lord say?" They will say, "The truth."

(3) When God appointed the Prophet Muḥammad, there had been a long gap in time between him and Jesus during which revelation had not descended. So when God sent down Gabriel with the revelation, the angels thought that God was sending down a command to bring about the final Hour, and were awe-struck. Therefore, Gabriel went to each of the heavens and dispelled the fear from the angels residing in them. Then they raised their heads, and some of them asked others, "What did your Lord say?" They replied, "The truth"—meaning "the revelation (*waḥy*)".

(4) The pronouns *they* and *their* refer to the angels, and the verse means that when God sent revelation to some of the angels, the other angels heard it and were overwhelmed. Terrified, they fell into obeisance at the enormity of this divine sign. Then, when the fear was lifted from their hearts, either the angels asked the angels who had been given revelation, "What did your Lord say?" or else the angels asked each other, "What did your Lord say?" Then, they understood that the command was directed at beings other than themselves.

Upon contemplating this verse and considering what we already said about it, you will come to understand the flaws in these views. Even if some of them may have merit as independent statements, they are unsuitable as exegesis for this verse.

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ قُلِ اللَّهُ ۙ وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(34:24) ***Say: Who provides for you from the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah. And surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest***

error.

This embarks upon another argument against the idolaters. This time, it is from the angle of sustenance (*rizq*), which is the main reason they were worshipping their demigods, since they believed that worshipping their demigods would placate them and encourage the them to increase their sustenance.

Therefore, the Prophet was commanded to ask them who really sustained them from the heavens and the earth? The reply is that it is God—exalted be He—for sustenance, in and of itself, is a created thing, and there is no creator but God. Even the idolaters knew that, but they disdained to admit it with their tongues even if their hearts conceded to it. For that reason, God commanded the Prophet to provide them with the reply: *Say: Allah.*

And surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error: This concludes the Prophet's words, after had had presented a decisive argument and the clear truth on the question of godhood. These words are fair, and indicate that every claim must be either guided or misguided, true or false; there is no third possibility. Since he and they are making opposing claims, both sides cannot be correct; either he is guided and they or not, or they are guided and he is not. Therefore, he urges them to consider his argument fairly and distinguish guidance from misguidance, truth from falsehood.

On a right way (ʿalā hudā) and *in manifest error* (fī ḍalāl) are phrased differently, each beginning with different prepositions; namely, *ʿalā* ("on") and *fī* ("in"). This is to convey the sense that a person who is guided is like a person who atop a lighthouse, seeing the way and able to understand where happiness lies. In contrast, a person who is misguided is shrouded in darkness; he does not know where to put his feet, which way to go, or what he is expected to be doing.

قُلْ لَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(34:25) ***Say: You shall not be questioned about what we are guilty of, and we shall not be questioned about what you do.***

Meaning, deeds; specifically, evil deeds. They [that is, responsibility for them] are confined to their doer; they do not affix to anyone else. Therefore, no one else shall be questioned about them. You shall not be questioned about any evils that we wrought—for that is our responsibility—nor shall

we be questioned about anything that you are responsible for.

This paves the way for the succeeding verses about the final gathering and judgment, for when two groups disagree over what is right and wrong, it is necessary to judge between them and distinguish them, so that the correct recompense can be meted out for good and evil. The one who does that is the exalted Lord.

The verse says *what you do* (taʿmalūn) rather than "what you are guilty of" to maintain a spirit of politeness during debate.[1]

قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾

(34:26) ***Say: Our Lord will gather us together; then He will decide between us in truth, and He is the Arbiter, the Knower.***

Since it is necessary to recompense every doer of good and evil with the recompense for their deeds, it is necessary to distinguish between the two groups by gathering them, then splitting them up. This is a matter which should be done by the One who manages things; namely, the Lord. He commands the Prophet to remind them that the One who gathers them then judges them in truth is the Lord of both sides. He is the omniscient judge who shall judge between all things in creation and management, to distinguish each thing from another, like the verse says: *The heavens and the earth were affixed, then He split them apart* (21:30). And he knows all things.

This verse establishes two things. First, it establishes that the resurrection shall be to distinguish between those who do good and those who do evil. Second, it establishes that lordship, and the right to distinguish between people and recompense them, is not scattered among a multiplicity of demigods; instead, it is confined to the one Lord. Therefore, this verse disproves the lordship of the beings they took as lords.

Al-Fattāḥ (the Judge) is one of the beautiful names of God. *Fatḥ* means to find a distinguishing characteristic (*faṣl*) between two things in order to arrange them in a hierarchy, just as opening (*fatḥ*) a door to enter requires finding a means of separation (*faṣl*) between the door and what it is blocking. *Fatḥ* encompasses judging and distinguishing between

1 ʿAllāmah is mentioning this because "what you are guilty of" would be a more parallel expression since the first part of the verse says *what we are guilty of* (ajramnā). (Trans.)

two things with respect to their essence, their attributes, and their acts.

قُلْ أَرُونِيَ الَّذِينَ أَلْحَقْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا ۚ بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

(34:27) ***Say: Show me those whom you joined with Him as partners. Nay! He is Allah, the Mighty, the Wise.***

This is another command to the Prophet, ordering him to ask them to show him their demigods so he can investigate them. Do they have the necessary attributes of divinity that would make them suitable to worship? Do they have independent life, knowledge, power, hearing, and sight? This is the meaning of *show me those whom you have joined with Him as partners*, meaning, those they supplemented God with as partners.

Then it refutes this. No! They cannot be partners to God. Either they will show him their idols which they worship, which are dead matter, devoid of any life, knowledge, or power; or they will show him the lords of these idols—angels or otherwise—whom they depict with their statues. Although these beings are not devoid of life, knowledge, or power, and they have been granted attributes of perfection by God, they do not independently exercise any of these attributes such that the divine duties would be delegated to them, as the polytheist claimed. The Necessary Existent, with Its infinite power, disallows that one of Its creations should share any of Its utter perfection.

Were they to claim that these beings share any of the divine duties, without enjoying independent, innate power, this would conflict divine wisdom.

This argument is alluded to in *Nay! He is the Mighty, the Wise*, for His might is what prevents other beings from sharing in His infinite divine attributes of lordship and divinity. It prevents other beings from encroaching upon the environs of His perfection, since He is infinite and boundless. Divine wisdom forbids there from being independent or even non-independent partners to God.

From this, it is clear that this verse contains a decisive proof. Ponder it well.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(34:28) ***And We have only sent you as a shield,*** **(kāffatan)**, ***a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner, but most people know not.***

Al-Rāghib says in *al-Mufradāt*:

> *Kaff* is the human hand. It is what a human being uses to grasp and give things with. The verb form *kafaftuhu* means "I took him by the hand" and "I pushed him away with my hand". Eventually, *kaff* began to mean "push away", whether or not it involved the actual hand. For instance, a blind man is called *makfūf*.
>
> The Qur'an says, *And we only sent you as a* kāffatan to the people. Here, it means to keep them (*kāffan*) from wrongdoing. The *-ah* [in *kāffah/kāffatan*] makes it an intensified form, reflecting both frequency and intensity of doing the action, similar to the words *rāwiyah* ("storyteller"), *ʿallāmah* ("learned person", "polymath"), and *nasābah* ("skilled genealogist").

This understanding [of the meaning of *kāffah*] is reinforced by the description of the Prophet as a bearer of glad tidings and warner (*bashīr* and *nadhīr*), since both *bashīr* and *nadhīr* act as descriptions (*ḥālān*) further clarifying the meaning of *kāffatan lil-nās*.

Some might argue that *kāffah* really means "all", in the sense of "We sent you as a messenger to all people."[1] However, this interpretation is convoluted.

This is because, in order for *kāffatan lil-nās* to mean "all people", *kāffah* must (a) mean "all", and (b) be a descriptor (*ḥāl*) of *al-nās*. However, according to grammarians, a *ḥāl* may not precede the thing that it is describing while what it is describing in the genitive case (*majrūr*).[2]

Know further that while the verse speaks of prophethood, it is actually presenting another argument for *tawḥīd*, just like the previous verses. This argument pertains to sending a divine messenger. A true Lord (*rabb*) must send a messenger since His role is to manage people and guide them

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1 This is how it is most commonly rendered in English translation. For instance, the Yusufali translation reads: "We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not." ʿAllāmah is providing a different explanation of the word *kāffah*, although he still refers to the universality of the Prophet. (Trans.)

2 Here, referring to the ending *-i* in *lil-nās-i*. (Trans.)

towards happiness and the ultimate goals of their existence. Therefore, the universality of the Prophet's message—given that the Prophet is the messenger of God, not the messenger of anyone else—proves that lordship is confined to God. Were there other lords, they would have sent their messengers, and the Prophet's message would not be universal; their messengers would have also disputed with him. This is the meaning of a saying attributed to ʿAlī: "If your Lord had a partner, it would have sent its own messenger."

Because if *kāffah* meant "all people" as al-Rāghib has interpreted, then it would not be something that most people do not understand. While most people do not grasp the implication that since only God sends messengers to keep people from sin, bringing glad tidings and warnings, He must be the only being who enjoys lordship.

In short, the verse says that the idolaters cannot show any of God's partners, while God sent the Prophet as a guardian against sins to *all* people, a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. And if there were other Gods or demigods, then God would not be able to send you as a prophet to all people while some of them had other gods. And God knows best.

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(34:29) ***And they say, When will this promise happen, if you are telling the truth?***

This is a question about when the resurrection and judgment shall occur. It is linked to a verse that came earlier; namely: *Say: Our Lord will gather us together; then He will decide between us in truth, and He is the Arbiter, the Knower* (34:26).

This is also, incidentally, another argument for the interpretation that we put forward for *And We have only sent you as a shield…* (34:28). Otherwise, if the interpretation of 34:28 were something other than what we said [that is, if it were truly to be about prophethood rather than *tawḥīd*], this and the next verse [that is, 34:29–30] would intervene between *And we have only sent you…* and the later verses which discuss the concept of prophethood.

قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَأْخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(34:30) ***Say: You have this tryst on a day that you can neither***

hasten nor delay for a single hour.

God commands [the Prophet] to reply to them that the Resurrection shall occur at a fixed, pre-ordained, unchangeable time. God has decisively sworn that this shall happen. However, He has kept this time hidden, and none know it but Him.

Some exegetes have suggested that this verse refers to the time when a person dies. However, this view is unsound, since the idolaters were not asking when they will die. They were asking about the Promised Day, which is the day on which people are gathered and judged. These are characteristics of the Day of Resurrection, not the moment of death.

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *Until [the time] when fear is removed from their hearts, they will ask, What did your Lord say? They will say, The truth, and He is the High, the Great* (34:23), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* relates in a narration from Abū al-Jārūd that Imām al-Bāqir said:

This occurred because the inhabitants had not heard any revelation descend between the time of Jesus, the son of Mary, and Muḥammad. When God sent Jibraʾīl to Muḥammad, the inhabitants of the heavens heard the sound of the Qurʾan being revealed. It resounded like iron clattering onto rock, and they fainted.

After Jibraʾīl finished [receiving] the revelation, he descended to each level of the heavens and removed the terror from its inhabitants' hearts, saying, "Dispel from their hearts." Then some of them started asking others, "What did your Lord say?"

They replied, "Truth, and He is the High, the Great."

Author's comments: A similar account has been related from the Prophet in Sunni narrations, with and without full chains of narration. In any case, the narration is an instance of the application of the verse and not the sole root interpretation.

(2) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr* (from Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ʿAbbas) and in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* (from Ibn ʿAbbās), it is related that the

> Messenger of God said:[1]
> I have been given five things that no prophet before me was given. I was sent to all the people (*kāffatan*), red and white, whereas other prophets were sent to their own peoples.[2] I have been aided by a fear which terrifies my enemies at a month's distance. I have tasted the spoils of war (*maghnam*). The earth has been made a place of prostration (*masjid*) and pure for me. And I have been granted the capability to intercede. I have saved that for my nation on the Day of Resurrection, and, God willing, it [my intercession] shall reach everyone who did not associate any partner with God.

Author's comments: This same idea is also narrated from Ibn al-Mundhir from Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet.

However, there are also opposing narrations. It is narrated copiously (*mustafīḍ*) that Noah was sent to all people. Others say that Abraham was sent to all people. Still others say that the *ulū al-ʿazm* prophets were all sent to the entire world.

Similarly, other narrations indicate that other prophets can also intercede. Furthermore, God says: *Those whom you call upon other than Allah cannot intercede—except for those who bear witness* (shahida) *to the truth, while they know* (43:86). The Qur'an also describes Jesus as one of those who bears witness (*al-shuhadāʾ*): *On the Day of Resurrection, he shall be a witness upon them* (4:159). [Therefore, the Prophet is not the only intercessor.]

Many Sunni and Shiʿi narrations describe the Prophet as having been sent to all people (*lil-nās kāfah*). Many of them take the word *kāffah* in *wa mā arsalnāka illā kāffatan lil-nās* (34:28) as a description (*ḥāl*) of *lil-nās*. However, the Basran grammarians do not allow for a describer (*ḥāl*) to precede what is being described, although the Kufan grammarians do.

1 This is related in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* via from Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ʿAbbās, and in *Majmaʿ* from him.

2 ʿAllāmah does not consider this a correct interpretation of *kāffatan*, as he explains in his commentary on 34:28 and also in his comments on this narration. ʿAllāmah's objection is not to the universality of the Prophet's message, but, rather, is grammatical. (Trans.)

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Verses 31–54

This final section of the sūrah speaks about prophethood, especially the debates about prophethood and what the idolators (*mushrikīn*) used to believe about it. Throughout, it dispels their mistaken notions about death and the resurrection. It is linked to verse 34:28 in the previous section which reads: *And We have only sent you as a shield* (kāffatan)*, a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner, but most people know not* (34:28). You already have come to recognize that this verse is like a *barzakh* (intermediary realm) between the two sections speaking of prophethood, and it presents prophethood as an argument for the oneness of God.

Commentary

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ ۗ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْقُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣١﴾ قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ ۖ بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(34:31-32) ***And those who disbelieve say, We will not believe in this Qur'an or what came before it. Could you but see when the unjust shall be held standing before their Lord, reproaching each other, while the downtrodden shall say to the arrogant, Were it not for you, we would have been faithful. And the arrogant*** **(al-ẓālimūn)** ***shall say to the downtrodden, Did we turn you away from the guidance after it came to you? You transgressed.***

Those who disbelieve (alladhīna kafarū) refers to the idolaters (*mushrikūn*). *What came before it* (alladhī bayna yadayh) refers to the divine scriptures, such as the Torah and the Gospel. This is because the idolaters did not believe in prophethood and therefore did not believe in the resulting divine scriptures.

Some exegetes hold that *what came before it* (alladhī bayna yadayh) refers to the hereafter. However, there is no evidence to support this view. The Qur'an often refers to the Torah and Gospel as *what came before it*. Furthermore, while some exegetes say that *those who disbelieve* refers to the Jews, this view is erroneous.

The definite article *al-* in *al-ẓālimūn* presumably denotes that the reader or listener can envision *the arrogant* as a distinct group (*lām al-ʿahd*). This verse and the next two verses portray the dire consequences of rejecting truth (*kufr*) which originate from the leaders of *kufr* misguiding their followers. They will not be able to shake off these dire consequences. They shall regret, but their regret shall be of no avail.*Could you* [sing.] *but see* (34:31) is addressed to the Prophet privately, since the *kuffār* were too standoffish to comprehend what was being said.

When the unjust—the *unjust* are those who reject the book of God and His Messenger who wronged themselves through rejection (*kufr*).

Standing before your Lord—for accounting and recompense, on the day of resurrection.

Reproaching each other means that they will be quarrelling and disowning each other.

The downtrodden shall say builds on how some of them will be reproaching each other.

The *downtrodden* (alladīna istuḍʿafū) were those who followed the *arrogant* (alladhīna istakbarū), who were the leaders.

Were it not for you, we would have been faithful—By this, they mean, "You forced us into disbelief, and kept us away from faith."

And the arrogant shall say to the downtrodden—This is a reply to the downtrodden. The arrogant deny what they are being accused of; namely, that they forced the downtrodden to disbelieve.

Did we turn you away..?—This is a rhetorical question, meaning, "Were *we* the ones who turned you away?"

…from the guidance? "The Prophet's call reached you. This is the strongest evidence that we are not to blame for keeping you from faith. Rather, you yourself chose to believe or disbelieve."

You transgressed—"You were the ones who persisted in wrongdoing. You erred by rejecting [the truth] when it came to you. We did not force you. Your disbelief is your fault! We are innocent of that."

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا بَلْ مَكْرُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ

تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا ۚ وَأَسَرُّوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۚ هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(34:33) ***And the downtrodden shall say to the proud, No, planning night and day, you ordered us to deny Allah and set up likes with Him. They shall hide their regret when they see the punishment. And We will shackle the necks of those who disbelieved. Are they being requited for anything other than what they did?***

And the downtrodden shall say to the proud—They are parrying the claim made by the innocent.

No, planning night and day—"You plotted night and day to keep us reject the truth."

To deny Allah and set up likes (andādan) *with Him*—"You schemed night and day to weaken us, lord over us and make us obedient to you, so we would do whatever you wanted. We felt we had no other choice but to obey you when you commanded us to reject [faith] and associate partners with God."

Andādan means "the likes of God" or "similar demigods."

They shall hide their regret (asarrū al-nadāmah)—*asarrū* means "hide" or "conceal"—*when they see the punishment*—when they see there is no escape. They will hide their regret on the day of resurrection, which is a day when all things will be laid bare and nothing will be hidden from God. This is similar to how they lied about God, denied taking partners to God, and swore by God. All of that merely reveals the despicable traits that had wormed their way inside themselves. While alive, they hid their regret lest their enemies taunt them. On the day of resurrection, although all secrets will be made plain, they will still try to dissimulate, for lying is a trait that has become entrenched in their souls; thus, it will become clear that they are habitual liars.

And We will shackle **(aghlāl)*****—the necks of those who disbelieved. Are they being requited for anything other than what they did?*** Their deeds have turned into shackles around their necks, imprisoning them in the punishment.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(34:34) ***Whenever We sent a warner to a town, those living in luxury*** **(al-mutrafūn)** ***said, We deny what you have been sent with.***

Mutrafūn is the passive participle of the verb *r-t-f* ("to live in luxury and opulence", thereby literally meaning "luxuriously equipped" or simply "rich"). Together with the next verse, the use of this word implies that wealth can beget arrogance in the face of the truth.

وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(34:35) ***They said, We have more wealth and children, and will not be punished.***

They refers to *those living in luxury* (al-mutrafūn, 34:34). Since wealth and opulence are fickle, people become over attached to them. They see material wealth as the greatest success, whether or not it involves aligning themselves with the truth. They think only of the material world and forget what comes next.

For that reason, God tells us that they boast, *We have more wealth and children,*" for these are their only measures of success; certainly, they could never harm them.

We… will not be punished—in the hereafter. Heedless, they dismiss the possibility that they could be punished because they see nothing but riches and offspring. In fact, to them, punishment is being stripped of these things! As long as they have these things, they cannot see themselves as enduring punishment.

There is another point here. They were so blinded by their wealth and offspring that they presumed that they enjoyed special honour before God, and they presumed that this honour would last forever. So their words mean: "We have a special place before God, for He has given us so much wealth and so many children. Since we are so honoured, God would never punish us, even if there is a hell in the hereafter."

In that regard, this verse is similar to:

And if We make him taste mercy from Us after distress that has touched him, he would most certainly say: This is mine, and I do not think the hour

will come. If I am sent back to my Lord, I shall have good from Him. (41:50)

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(34:36) ***Say, My Lord outspreads and straitens sustenance for whom He wills. However, most people know not.***

This and the following four verses respond to their claim that *We have more wealth and children, and will not be punished* (34:35). The reply has two facets. First, God is the one who gives or withholds sustenance from someone, including wealth and children; He does this according to His wisdom and understanding of the greater good, not according to what people desire, and He delivers this sustenance through various channels. However, simply receiving more does not mean that a person is faithful or faithless, or even that a person is prudent or foolish. Sometimes, He gives to one but not the other.

Therefore, there are no grounds to say that simply having wealth brings one [eternal] happiness successful or is a token of honor.

This is the meaning of *Say: My Lord outspreads and straitens sustenance…*" God is spoken of as *My Lord* here [rather than *their Lord* or *your Lord*] because they did not see God as their lord, and sustaining a person is part of the job of a lord (*rabb*).

Outspreads (yabsuṭu) means "spreads out".

Sustenance for whom He wills—For any of His servants, according to His wisdom and understanding of the greater good.

Straitens (yaqdir)—Meaning that He constricts it.

However, most people know not—When people lack something, they attribute it to accidental, material causes, not the true giver. When they attain something, they attribute it to prudence and their own good management. This is true foolishness![1]

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1 ᶜAllāmah practiced what he preached with respect to his beliefs about sustenance. It is one thing for the wealthy to talk about how God distributes sustenance out of divine wisdom. It is another for someone suffering poverty. ᶜAllāmah is said to have lived extremely modestly; when he lived in Qum, he is said to have been so poor that he sometimes could not afford to light a lamp, and the house he rented was too small for his students to visit him, so they had to sit outside at the door. (Trans.)

وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرِّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَنْ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضِّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ آمِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

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(34:37–8) ***Neither your wealth nor your children are what will bring you near Us. Whoever believes and acts righteously shall have a double reward for what they do, and they shall be secure in the dwellings on high. Those who strive against Our signs shall be summoned to the punishment.***

This is the second facet of the response to *We have more wealth and children, and will not be punished.* A person is spared punishment because they are near to God, not because they have wealth or children. Furthermore, wealth and children do not bring a person nearer to God such that they might free their owner or progenitor from Hell. To convey this, the verse employs the rhetorical device of swapping cause and effect. That is, rather than saying "your wealth and children will not free you from Hell," it says, "your wealth and children will not bring you near Us".

It means: *Neither your wealth nor your children* which you relied upon to save you from hell *are what* altogether will *bring you near Us*.

Whoever believes and acts righteously—with respect to their wealth and children. If a person spends their wealth in the way of God and raises faithful, righteous children with a religious upbringing, then they *shall have a double reward*. Perhaps the reward is described as *double* since they guided others and were guided, and also because good deeds are multiplied up to ten times, or even more.

In the dwellings on high means in lofty alcoves or domes, *secure* from the punishment, since they will not be punished.

Those who strive against Our signs—who work against Our signs and try to weaken Us or outstrip Us—*shall be summoned to the punishment*—despite their enormous wealth and numerous children.

Neither your wealth nor your children are what will bring you near Us: Here, the text shifts to addressing all people in general. The principle here is the same for all people, whether they accept or reject faith. People will benefit from their wealth and children if they have faith and direct

them towards righteous ends; otherwise, their wealth and children will bring them naught but misery.

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۚ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ ۖ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(34:39) ***Say: My Lord outspreads and straitens sustenance for whichever of His servants that He wills. Whatever you spend, He replaces*** **(yukhlifuhu).** ***He is the best sustainer.***

Regarding the meaning of *yukhlifuhu*, *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān* says:

> The phrase *akhlafa Allāh lahu/ᶜalayhi* is used when God replaces what a person has spent or lost.

It can be understood from the text that "spending" here means "spending on a good cause." It means that whatever is spent on a good cause is not lost; rather, God replaces what has been spent.

Say: My Lord outspreads and straitens sustenance for whichever of His servants that He wills: This indicates that the matter of sustenance is entirely in God's hands. His wealth neither diminishes nor increases when He gives or withholds it.

Whatever you spend—much or little, and any type of wealth—*He replaces*—either in this world, or the next. *He is the best sustainer*—He gives with open hands, whereas people act like businessmen and expect something in exchange.[1] For He is the true sustainer, whereas others are mere intermediaries in delivering His sustenance.

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَٰؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(34:40) ***On the day when He shall gather them all, then say to the angels, Were you what they worshipped?***

According to the context of the verses, *them all* (-hum jamīᶜan) includes both the worshippers and the ones they worshipped.

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1 The Latin expression here *do ut des* – "I give, so that I may get" – is appropriate here and is sometimes associated with the term *muᶜāwaḍah* ("contractual reciprocity") that ᶜAllāmah uses in the text. (Trans.)

Then [He will] say to the angels, Were you what they worshipped? The question here is not really about whether some people worshipped the angels. Were that really the question, the angels would be in no place to deny it, since, in the world, some people did worship the angels, even though the angels abhorred it. Rather, the question is really whether the angels agreed to be worshipped, similar to how God will ask Jesus, the son of Mary:

Were you the one who told people, Take me and my mother as two Gods, other than Allah? (5:116)

Rather, the intention behind the question is to upbraid the idolaters so they despair of hoping for aid from the angels and intercessors whom they had worshipped while alive precisely in the hopes that they would intercede for them.

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيُّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ ۖ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ ۖ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(34:41) ***They shall say, Glory be to You! You are our guardian* (waliyyunā)*, not them. They used to worship the jinn; most of them had faith in them.***

The angels reply with the utmost politeness. Firstly, they absolve God of any possible blemish (*Glory be to You!*); this expression includes but is not limited to the declaration that none but God is worthy of worship. Then, they deny that they allowed anyone to worship them.

However, they do not utter such an unspeakable thing directly. Instead, to preserve the sanctity of the divine, they reply by saying that God is the only *walī* ("guardian"); therefore, they cannot be a *walī*. By saying this, they imply they did not allow themselves to be worshipped, since, for a being to be worshipped, there must be a mutual relationship of guardianship (*muwālāh*) between the worshipper and the worshipped. Therefore, by saying that only God enjoys *wilāyah* ("guardianship", "authority"), they say that there could not have been any mutual guardianship (*muwālāh*) between themselves and humans. Therefore, since there was no *muwālāh*, they did not assent to be worshipped.

They used to worship the jinn; most of them had faith in them: The idolaters worshipped three groups of beings: angels, jinn, and saints. They considered angels and jinn to be the most worthy of worship, even though

saints are, by definition, those who have attained perfection, and hence are superior to angels and jinn.

They used to worship the jinn suggests that the jinn were fine with being worshipped.

The jinn that the idolaters worshipped were jinn who they saw as the root of all evil in the world. They worshipped them to stave off evil, just as they worshipped the angels out of greed for their gifts and as a form of barter.

Some exegetes have the mistaken notion that *jinn* in this verse refers to Iblīs and his descendants and tribe, and "worship" means "obey". That is, the idolaters used to obey Iblīs and his lot when they incited them to evil. For instance, the idolaters would obey when the evil jinn urged them to worship the angels or commit abominations. However, this view can be countered by considering the word *faith*. The verse does not say that they *obeyed* the jinn; rather, it says that they had *faith* in them.

Similarly, the verse does not say that the jinn appeared to them as angels, such that the idolaters imagined that they were angels and worshipped them. Nor does it say that the jinn used to enter their statues, and, therefore, when they worshipped the statues, they were really worshipping the jinn.

Possibly, the verse says "*most* of them had faith in them" rather than "*all* of them had faith in them", since most of them used to worship the jinn to ward off evil. Some exegetes have erroneously said that "most" really means "all" here; this interpretation is based on the assumption that "worship" means "obey", whereas you already know that this is not the case.

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(34:42) ***So, on that day, none of you shall have power over another, either to harm or to help. We shall say to the tyrants, Taste the punishment of fire which you used to deny.***

This follows from the angels' disavowal that they sought to be worshipped. In several places in the Qur'an, those who worshipped others will disavow each other, as in:

And on the Day of Resurrection, they will reject the way you made them partners with Allah. (35:14)

The meaning of the verse is clear.

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَٰذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَقَالُوا مَا هَٰذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُفْتَرًى ۚ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٤٣﴾

(34:43) ***And when Our clear signs are recited to them, they say, This is but a man who wants to turn you away from what your fathers used to worship. And they say, This is but a lie that is forged. And when the truth comes to them, those who reject faith say, This is nothing but clear sorcery.***

This is what some of the idolaters said to each other after hearing the verses rebuking them for pushing people to cling to their ancestral traditions. Describing God's signs as *clear* also rebukes them. It is as if it is saying: When these clear, doubtless signs and verses were presented to you, instead of calling your people to follow them, you urged your people to remain chained to their ancestral customs! The *-kum* which is appended to *ābāʾukum* intensifies the sense of how ardently they strove to keep the people on the path of their forefathers.

This is but a lie that is forged: This is part of what *they say* and refers to the verses of the Qur'an (*āyāt*). They mock these verses by referring to them dismissively as "this" and by calling them mere fabrications about God, instead of saying [as they should!] that "these clear signs descended from God, the Exalted." They also demonstrate that they have understood nothing from these verses and they think these verses are like anything else.

And when the truth comes to them, those who reject faith say, This is nothing but clear sorcery: *When the truth comes* means "when it reaches them and becomes apparent." The phrase *those who reject faith* (*kafarū*) itself explains why this happened. That is, although the clear, obvious truth reached them, their commitment to rejecting faith impelled them to dismiss it as sorcery and falsehood.

وَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ كُتُبٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا ۖ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

(34:44) ***And we did not give them any books to study, nor did we send them before you a warner.***

This sentence emphasizes their baseless determination to reject truth in favour of their personal desires. This sentence is an adverbial clause (*ḥāl*) describing *those who reject faith* (34:43), meaning the *kuffār* among the Quraysh.

It means: They treated the clear truth as sorcery, even though We had not given them books to study so they could distinguish between truth and falsehood. Nor had We sent them messengers before to warn them and clarify things to them, such that they might argue on the basis of their divine scriptures or prophets that "this is true" or "this is false".

وَكَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا بَلَغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي ۖ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٥﴾

(34:45) ***And those before them rejected [the truth], and they have not yet attained a tenth*** **(miʿshār)** ***of what We gave them. They denied My messengers. How was the manifestation of [My] disapproval*** **(nakīr)*****!***

The first and second occurrences of *they*/*them* refer to the *kuffār* of the Quraysh and those who followed them. The third and fourth occurrences of *they*/*them* refer to those who came before. *Miʿshār* means "tenth". *Nakīr* means *inkār* ("disapproval", "disavowal"). Here, *nakīr* means that they shall be seized by divine chastisement.

It means: The predecessors of the *kuffār* of the Quraysh also denied the truth of God's signs. And today's *kuffār* of the Quraysh lack even a tenth of the power and might that We gave to the ancients! When the ancients denied My messengers, how severe was My chastisement, and how weak were the Quraysh!

The shift from first person plural (*We gave them*) to the first person singular (*My messengers*) expresses the enormity of their error and instills terror at being taken for it.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَاحِدَةٍ ۖ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مَثْنَىٰ وَفُرَادَىٰ ثُمَّ تَتَفَكَّرُوا ۚ مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِنْ جِنَّةٍ ۚ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

(34:46) ***Say: I exhort*** **(aʿiẓukum)** ***you to one thing: rise up for Allah***

in pairs and alone, then think. There is no madness in your companion; he is but a warner to you, before a severe chastisement.

Exhort is used here in the sense of "advise". *Rise up for Allah* means "arise, and stir yourselves for the sake of God and His noble face." *In pairs and alone* means to do that two by two or one by one. It is a way of saying that they should rise up separately and not as a mass or mob, since the rabble is senseless and brainless; it often does away with truth and begets falsehood.

***There is no madness in your companion* (mā bi-ṣāḥibikum min jinnah):** This is a new sentence. The particle *mā* is for negation, as evinced by the succeeding words *he is but a warner to you, before a severe chastisement. Mā* could also be understood as an interrogative particle or as a relative pronoun linking to *madness* (min jinnah) and explaining it.

Your companion (ṣāḥibikum) refers to the Prophet. The expression *your companion* is used to remind them that he has been among them for forty years, from the time he was born until the time his prophetic mission began. In all that time, they never saw him be deluded or weak-minded or in any other mental state that might make one think he had lost his mind.

It means: Say to them: "I advise you to rise up for the sake of God separately, so that you may clarify your thinking and rectify your views, two by two or one by one. Think about my matter [the Prophetic message], for I have been among you my entire life, and have always had sound views. I have always been honest and trustworthy, nor have I never gone mad. I but warn you, in the face of a severe chastisement on the day of resurrection. I advise you sincerely and am not deceiving you."

قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ ۖ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٤٧﴾

(34:47) ***Say, Whatever reward I have asked you for is for yourselves. My reward is upon Allah, and He witnesses all things.***

This is a way of saying that he is not seeking any sort of wage for his prophetic mission. That is, if he were to take a wage and then give it back to them, he wouldn't really be receiving a wage. Therefore, he is not asking for one. This sentence is to reassure them that his prophetic mission is not an excuse to grab wealth or power.

My reward is upon Allah, and He witnesses all things: This is to stave off any possible objection to the previous sentence, in that some might argue that a rational human being never does anything without a goal. Therefore, he says that he will receive a recompense, but it is for God to give, not for the people to give. God witnesses what he is doing; God witnesses all things.

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قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿٤٨﴾

(34:48) ***Say, My Lord casts forth*** **(yaqdhifu)** ***the truth; He knows the unseen.***

Yaqdhifu means "cast" or "throw". *Knows the unseen* (ʿallām al-ghuyūb) is either a second predicate of the sentence, or else it is the predicate of a new sentence whose subject is elided. The pronoun *He* refers to God.

According to the context of the previous verses, "casting forth the truth" means "revealing the Qur'an", since the Qur'an distinguishes between truth and falsehood. It is the truth, hurled forth from the divine environs, from the One who knows the unseen, smashing falsehood into oblivion. God says:

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We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it smashes it, then it disappears! (21:18)

Say: The truth has come and falsehood has vanished; falsehood always vanishes. (17:18)

قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبْدِئُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ ﴿٤٩﴾

(34:49) ***Say, Truth has come. Falsehood neither creates nor restores.***

From the context of the previous verses, it can be understood that *truth has come* refers to the revelation of the Qur'an, whose decisive, resounding arguments sever falsehood from its root.

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Falsehood neither creates nor restores: Meaning, after truth arrives, falsehood makes nothing new. And once falsehood perishes, it never resurfaces. This is a way of saying that falsehood has been done away with, since it has been severed at its root by the truth (that is, the Qur'an).

قُلْ إِنْ ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي ۖ وَإِنِ اهْتَدَيْتُ فَبِمَا يُوحِي إِلَيَّ رَبِّي ۚ

إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

(34:50) ***Say, If I err, I err against my own soul. If I am guided, it is because of what my Lord has revealed to me. He is hearing, near.***

This is the legacy of truth. (And "truth" here, as we said before, is the Qur'an.) God has made the absolute truth known. Since it is truth from all angles, it never errs at pinpointing reality from all sides. Otherwise, it would be falsehood from that angle. The revelation guides and never misguides.

For that reason, it emphasizes: *Say: If I err, I err against my own soul.* That is, suppose I were to err; it would be my responsibility, for error arises from the human soul [rather than the divine]. *If I am guided, it is because of what my Lord has revealed to me*. He has revealed the truth; it cannot possibly misguide, and it only engenders guidance.

He is hearing, near: He hears prayers, unhindered by distance. The previous verses lead up to this description: God casts forth the truth, since He knows the unseen. Nothing is hidden from Him, and nothing escapes His notice; nor can anything interfere with His will to guide people through revelation. God says:

The knower of the unseen, He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses as a messenger; for surely He makes a guard to march before him and after him, so that He may know that they have truly delivered the messages of their Lord, and He encompasses what is with them and He records the number of all things. (72:26–28)

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ فَزِعُوا فَلَا فَوْتَ وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٥١﴾

(34:51) ***And if you could see when they shall be terrified. There shall be no escape, and they shall be seized from a near place.***

This and the remainder of the verses in this sūrah describe what will happen to the idolaters of the Quraysh after they die.

And if you could see when they shall be terrified—when these idolaters are terrified upon death.

There shall be no escape—They shall not be able to flee God, nor shall they be able to protect themselves or scheme their way out.

They shall be seized from a near place—This is a figurative way of saying that there is nothing to separate them from the one who is taking

them. *Seized* (ukhidhū) is in the passive voice, indicating that they shall be taken before God. Elsewhere, He describes Himself as "near". What it means for God to be "near" is elaborated on in these verses:

We are nearer to it than you, but you do not see. (56:85)

Closer than the jugular vein. (50:16)

Allah intervenes between a man and his heart. (8:24)

God is closer to us than we are to our own souls; this is the position described as the *mirṣād* ("watch-tower") in 89:14 (*your Lord is on a watch-tower*). So how could a person think they could flee Him? How could they even think they could escape the honoured angels who take orders from Him directly, with no veil or intermediary between them and Him?

They shall be seized from a near place: This metaphor expresses how near God is to the human being. It is used because the human being cannot comprehend this nearness, since he is trapped in the prison of space and time and forgetfulness and material distractions. Otherwise [were there no need to speak metaphorically] the matter is heavier than this.

وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ وَأَنَّىٰ لَهُمُ التَّنَاوُشُ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

(34:52) ***And they shall say, We believe in it. But how can they attain* (tanāwush)** ***from a far place?***

Tanāwush means *tanāwul* ("attain"). The pronoun *it* (-bihi) refers to the Qur'an, according to the context.

A far place is the hereafter: the realm of recompense, the furthest place from the earthly plane, where they could strive and earn. The seen and the unseen have flipped: the worldly realm has disappeared, and the otherworldly realm has appeared (as the next verse indicates).

وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾

(34:53) ***They disbelieved in it before, and they conjecture over the unseen from a far place.***

This is an adverbial clause (*ḥāl*) describing the pronoun *they* in *how can they attain*.

They conjecture over the unseen from a far place means that, while alive, they speculated about the hereafter without any knowledge about it while it was hidden from their senses. They would say things like, "There won't

be any resurrection. There is no such thing as heaven or hell."

Some exegetes also say that this speaks of how they accused the Prophet of sorcery, lying, concocting, and poetizing.

Here and in the previous verse, both the earthly realm and the hereafter are described as "far places" since each one is far from the other.

Together, the two verses mean: When the idolaters are seized, they will believe in the truth—the Qur'an—but how will their newfound faith save them in the far-off realm of the hereafter? For, when they were in the land of the living, that now far-off, they fancied there was no such thing as life after death, and rejected the idea.

وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مُرِيبٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(34:54) ***And a barrier shall be placed before them and what they desire, as was done to the likes of them*** **(ashyāʿihim)** ***before. They were in disquieting doubt.***

According to the most apparent meaning of the text, *what they desire* are the material, earthly pleasures which death severed them from. *The likes of them* are those who came before them who were similar to them, or who followed the same religious traditions. *They were in disquieting doubt* explains why these things were *done to the likes of them*.

It means: Upon death, the idolaters will be torn away from the worldly pleasures they enjoyed, as was done to the ancient idolaters, who doubted the truth—or the hereafter—and merely conjectured about the unseen.

Know that what we have said about these verses is based on the apparent meaning of the text. Numerous Shiʿi and Sunni narrations say that these verses prophesize the rising of the Sufyānī, whose army will be swallowed up by the earth in al-Baydāʾ; this will be one of the signs of the appearance of the Mahdī. However, this is only one of the range of meanings of the verse.

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *They shall hide their regret when they see the punishment* (34:33), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says:

He[1] said, "In hellfire, they shall hide their regret when they see the *walī Allāh*."[2]
"[They shall feel] regret in the punishment, when they see the guardian from God (*walī Allāh*)."
Someone asked, "O son of the Messenger of God! Why should they bother hiding their regret while they are already in hell?"
He said, "They will loathe to be taunted by enemies."

Author's comments: This is also related from Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* relates:
A man made a disparaging comment about the wealthy in front of Imām al-Ṣādiq.
Imām al-Ṣādiq said, "Say that not! If wealth is used to maintain family ties or do good to one's brethren, God doubles the reward for it, for God says: *Neither your wealth nor your children are what will bring you near Us. Whoever believes and acts righteously shall have a double reward for what they do, and they shall be secure in the dwellings on high* (34:37)."

(3) Regarding this verse, in *al-Amālī* by Shaykh [al-Ṭūsi], there is a narration from Imām ʿAlī, part of which reads:[3]
On the day of resurrection, they shall undergo accounting. Then, each of them shall be rewarded ten times, or even up to seven hundred times [for one deed]. God says: *As a recompense from your Lord, giving account* (78:36); *they… shall have a double reward for what they do, and they shall be secure in the dwellings on high* (34:37).

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, it is related via a chain of narration from al-Sakūnī that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:
The Messenger of God said, "Whoever has faith that God will replace what he spends gives generously."In *al-Kafi*, it is related

1 One of the Imāms. (Trans.)

2 *Walī Allāh* = "friend of God"; referring to the Prophet or the Imams. (Trans.)

3 This is related via a chain of narration from the Commander of the Faithful (Imām ʿAlī).

via a chain of narration from Samāʿah that Imām al-Ṣādiq said:
The Messenger of God said, "Whoever is certain that God will replace what he gives spends liberally."

(5) In *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh relates from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib:
I heard the Messenger of God say, "Misfortunes lurk in every day, so stave off misfortune by giving charity."
Recite the verses telling of how charity is returned, for I heard the Messenger of God say, "*Whatever you spend, He replaces* (34:39). If they do not give, how will He replace it?"

(6) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related from Abū al-Jārud that Imām al-Bāqir said regarding *Say, Whatever reward I have asked you for is for yourselves. My reward is upon Allah, and He witnesses all things* (34:47):
This is because the Messenger of God asked his people to love his kinsfolk and not to vex them. *[It] is for yourselves* means that they will enjoy the reward for it.

(7) Regarding *And if you could see when they shall be terrified…* (34:51), in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, al-Ḥākim relates from Abū Hurayrah—and deems the narration authentic—that the Messenger of God said:
A man called al-Sufyāni shall arise from the depths of Damascus. Most of those who follow him will be from [the tribe of] Kalb. He shall commit slaughter, to the point that he splits open the bellies of pregnant women and kills their children. The tribe of Qays shall rally against him, but he shall leave none of them standing, and nowhere shall be free of his clutches.
Then a man from my household shall arise and meet al-Sufyānī. A contingent of soldiers shall be sent out and defeated. Then, al-Sufyānī and those with him will march towards al-Baydāʾ,[1] where the earth shall swallow them up. None shall survive, apart from those spared to tell people what had happened.

Author's comments: This narration has been related through many

1 An arid desert between Mecca and Medina. (Trans.)

Sunni chains of narration, in full and abridged. It is related through various chains from Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, Ḥudyahfah, Abū Hurayrah, and the grandfather of ʿAmr ibn Shuʿayb, as well as Um Salamah, Ṣafiyyah, ʿĀʾishah, and Ḥafṣah, the wives of the Prophet. It has also been related from Nafīrah , the wife of al-Qaʿqāʿ, from Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, but without a full chain of narration.

(8) Regarding *And if you could see when they shall be terrified. There shall be no escape…* (34:51), it is related in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* that Imām al-Bāqir said:[1]

By God, it is as if I can see the Qāʾim [the Mahdī] leaning against the Ḥijr [at the Kaʿbah in Mecca], invoking his right before God to the people.

Then he shall say, "O people! Whoever contests me in the name of God, know that I am closer to God. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of Adam, know that I am closer to Adam. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of Noah, know that I am closer to Noah. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of Abraham, know that I am closer to Abraham. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of Moses, know that I am closer to Moses. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of Jesus, know that I am closer to Jesus. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of Muḥammad, know that I am closer to Muḥammad. O people! Whoever contests me in the name of the Book of God, know that I am closer to the Book of God."

Then he shall proceed to the *maqām* [at the Kaʿbah], pray two units of prayer, and invoke his right before God.

Then Imām al-Bāqir said:

He, by God, is the *distressed* mentioned in the Book of God: *Who shall reply to the distressed when he calls upon Him, and relieve his suffering, and make you inheritors of the earth?*" (27:62)

The first to pay allegiance to him shall be Jibraʾīl, and then, 313 [people]. Those who can walk to him shall walk. Those who cannot reach him shall vanish from their beds [and appear at his side]. This is what the Commander of the Faithful [Imām

1 This is related from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr from Manṣūr ibn Yūnus from Abū Khālid al-Kābulī.

ʿAlī] meant when he said "they forsake their beds" and is also what is meant by the verse *Race towards what is best (*al-khayrāt*); wherever you are, Allah will bring you together* (2:148). *Al-Khayrāt* means *wilāyah.* Elsewhere, it says: *And if We hold back from them the punishment until a stated period of time…* (11:8). This is referring to the companions of the Qāʾim; by God, they will amass in a single hour.

When they reach Baydāʾ, the army of the Sufyānī shall march towards them. So God will command the earth to grasp them by their feet. This is the meaning of the verses *And if you could see when they shall be terrified. There shall be no escape, and they shall be seized from a near place. And they shall say, We believe in him*—meaning, "we believe in the Qāʾim from the family of Muḥammad."[1] *But how can they attain from a far place? They disbelieved in it before, and they conjecture over the unseen from a far place. And a barrier shall be placed before them and what they desire*—that is, not to be punished—*as was done to the likes of them before*—meaning, those who belied [the truth] and were destroyed. *They were in disquieting doubt* (34:51–54).

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The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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1 Here, Imām al-Bāqir interprets the pronoun *-hi* in *bihi* as "believe in him" rather than "believe in it", as it was translated. (Both interpretations are grammatically acceptable.) (Trans.)